

Pastoral Measure Report: Copnor, St Cuthbert

Diocese: Portsmouth
County: Hampshire

Dedication: St Cuthbert
Parish: Copton St Cuthbert

Listing: II
PM: 1916

NGR: SU 66 01
SMR: None

Location and setting: This early 20th-century Romanesque church is located within a tight plot with its chancel facing north onto Hayling Avenue, set within a grid pattern of contemporary terraced housing typical of this part of north-eastern Portsmouth. The church is large and tall and has some local visual impact among the two-storey houses, although due to the tightness of the street pattern it is not visible from a great distance.

The small elongated churchyard encloses the church on all sides and is laid to grass, bushes and flower beds, all well-kept, with a tarmac drive lined by flower beds separating it from the vicarage which lies directly adjacent to the south (the liturgical west end of the church – liturgical orientation will henceforth be used in the description).

Building history: The church was built in 1914-15 with money (£10,000) donated by Mr Heath Harrison to designs by E Stanley Hall. The site is on land belonging to the medieval manor of Copnor. The church replaced a mission chapel built shortly before to serve the expanding community. He also designed the vicarage, built in 1924.

The church's fortunes continued to be dominated by World Wars, Luftwaffe bombs destroying the chancel and damaging the nave. A church hall was built in 1948 adjacent to house the congregation and the church itself was not repaired until 1953-7, whereby the previously apsidal chancel was replaced with a simpler square-ended version, with a fine new stained glass window. The Lady chapel was also rebuilt, again with a square end instead of an apse.

Ground plan: Aisled nave, chancel, (ecclesiastical) north vestry, south Lady chapel, north organ chamber/vestry, tower rising from the south-west corner of the chancel, west porch with flanking vestibules.

Dimensions: Nave 120ft (38m) x 40ft (13m).

Building materials: The walls are built of local red bricks laid in Flemish bond with grey brick and tile bands used for decorative effect, the post-war repairs clearly evident in the fabric. Spanish clay roof tiles, Welsh clay tiles over the chancel.

General description: This is a large and quite grandly conceived church; it is worth noting that it was briefly considered for the role of cathedral of the nascent diocese in 1926. Since the destruction of the original chancel the unchallenged focus for the eye is the bell tower, very reminiscent (though obviously smaller) of that at Westminster Cathedral, built a few years earlier.

Disclaimer: Some confidential information may have been removed from the original report prior to publication of this copy on the Church Heritage Record



Above; the church seen from the south-east (ecclesiastical south-west)
Below; the interior looking east



Disclaimer: Some confidential information may have been removed from the original report prior to publication of this copy on the Church Heritage Record

The tower is of three stages, surmounted by a lead dome with cross finial rising from an octagon with pierced brick and terracotta panels. The belfry stage beneath the dome is a circular drum with four diagonal buttresses, between which are open arcades of round-headed arches supported by columns with cushion capitals.

The stage below has strip pilasters rising from the lower stage defining tall panels decorated with brick lozenges. A moulded stone band defines the tall lower stage, the pilasters defining pairs of tall round-headed blank arcades; there are two pairs of narrow windows lighting the stairwell in the west face.

The chancel was rebuilt with a tight hand on the purse-strings and this is reflected in its simplicity, nevertheless it succeeds in blending unobtrusively with the rest of the church. The east wall is plain, with the exception of the three-light window set within a recessed arch. The lights are round-headed and of equal height, leaving a wide tympanum above which is infilled with diagonal brickwork. There is a blind arcade of short pilasters along the window sill.

The chancel side walls are pierced by three single round-headed lights at the same height and dimensions as the nave clearstorey windows. The roof is of the same pitch as the nave, which is slightly higher, the exposed gable left blank; all the roofs have stone copings.

The chancel is flanked by a low Lady chapel to the south and an almost symmetrical organ chamber/vestry to the north, both with flat roofs. The latter has a row of rectangular domestic windows, while the Lady chapel has three similar windows in the south wall within round-headed recesses, flanked by square pilasters.

The nave has two sets of such windows equating to the large internal bays, each group of three windows flanked by pairs of thick gabled buttresses pierced with round-headed arches up to the height of the window arches, continuing up as square strip pilasters to the eaves. The cast iron rainwater hoppers are noteworthy, dated 1914; there are faithful copies in the chancel.

The west front is particularly well articulated, unfortunately the vicarage stands rather too close to it and impinges on the view. There is a protruding narthex flanked by transeptal vestibules, entered from the sides through recessed round-arched doorways with double-leaf doors. At the junction of the vestibules with the projecting narthex are buttresses with pierced archways, as with the nave.

The projecting front is pierced by four rectangular windows within round-headed recesses of equal size, one each in the flanking vestibules and two flanking the west entrance, which has a projecting arched hood over double doors. Above this, the west wall of the nave is pierced by three large round-headed windows within a broad recessed arch. Above this again, the gable is decorated with tile bands to either side of a round-headed louvred opening.

Moving inside the church, the interior is quite sparsely furnished and there is a great sense of space. The narthex is defined by a three-bay arcade carried on round and engaged stone columns with cushion capitals and bases, the side bays partitioned off by glazed and panelled screens to create a memorial chapel and a children's room.

Disclaimer: Some confidential information may have been removed from the original report prior to publication of this copy on the Church Heritage Record

The nave arcades are of two large bays with square brick piers and responds within which are groups of three narrow round-headed arches with continuous hood-moulds, giving access to the narrow aisles. These are again carried on round and engaged stone columns with cushion capitals and bases.

The clearstorey windows above (groups of three, see above) are contained within arches spanning the full width of the bays which support the domical vaulted ceiling. The chancel arch responds are plain and square in section, with a tall round-headed recess in the thickness of each with doors giving access to the Lady chapel and organ chamber/vestry.

The chancel is of one bay, barrel-vaulted, the ceiling painted white. The side walls have blind arcades of three bays, with a similar motif of arches springing from pilasters with scalloped capitals, with wood panelling below the brick tympani, the panelling continuing around the east wall.

The floor is of woodblock, with the exception of red and black tesserae down the length of the central aisle with cross arms at each end of the nave.

Furnishings and Fittings, all c 1960 unless otherwise specified

Altar: Plain table.

Reredos: Oak panelling with tester above forms an ensemble with the stained glass window.

Pulpit: Square concrete panelled pulpit on brick base, with tester suspended above.

Lectern: Plain wood.

Font: Large Neo-classical baluster font, c 1920.

Stained glass: In the east window only. Christ Blessing, very strongly visualised, by Osmund Caine, 1959. The flanking windows have symbols of the Crucifixion (left) and the Kingdom of Heaven (right).

Monuments: None.

Bells: Small single bell in the tower, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt, engraved WB 1744. The bell was bought from HMS Colossus in 1924. Ship's brass sanctus bell within the church dated 1944 from HMS Zambezi.

Organ: Large two manual pipe organ by Walker, 1959, rebuilt and extended in 1990 to create a serviceable and reliable instrument, if not of great interest.

Registers: Not seen.

Disclaimer: Some confidential information may have been removed from the original report prior to publication of this copy on the Church Heritage Record

Other woodwork: Light-stained choir stalls of simple design, chairs. Glastonbury chair. Large chest.

Communion rails: Tripartite hinged oak rails in chancel and chapel.

War memorials: World War I and II framed scrolls.

Miscellanea: Various banners, local handiwork.

Bibliography: Pevsner, N Pevsner and Lloyd, D: Buildings of England (1967): Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Church Guidebook.

State of repair: Summarised from the latest Quinquennial Inspection Report by Roger Boyce Associates of Portsmouth, November 1999. The building has been well maintained. The north aisle roof will at some point have to be partially renewed at an estimated cost of £40,000. There is evidence of rising salts at the west end, and some re-pointing is necessary.

Other churches in the area:

St Alban, Copnor Road. Large Gothic red-brick lancet church built in 1914 by Sir Charles Nicholson. 5-bay aisled nave, chancel, north chapel. Interesting interior, whitewashed with painted roof by S Dykes Bower. Some stained glass by Nicholson, fittings brought from other churches including 16th-18th century German stained glass from SS Peter and Paul, Fareham, 15th-century font from St Mary, Portsea, and 15th-17th-century plate. ¾ mile north.

Compiled 8th November 2001 by Joseph Elders, the Archaeology Officer of the Council for the Care of Churches after a visit to the site on 24th October 2001.