

# Overview of Section B

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## A new church for Bow Common – but – do we NEED a church? If so, WHY?

Everything was now in place and the process of arriving at a final design for the new church was well underway from 1956 with the first stone being laid at the very end of 1958 and this will soon be described.

Maguire and Murray were now on the map of architectural practice and there was growing interest in what they were up to. Bob Maguire describes an early exercise in 'going back to basics':

<sup>26</sup> *'In 1958, Keith Murray and I put on a sort of double-act audio-visual show at a Theological Conference at Swanwick using almost entirely every day, secular images to sketch out, as it were by tangential lines, **the idea of set-apart space as a deep need of the human psyche.** As we were addressing theologians, we started with the statement: "The Church does not need buildings".'*

*We said that if you want to celebrate the Eucharist, what you need is a loaf of bread, some wine and a cup and perhaps a trestle-table; but a rock or a tree stump will do as well, according to whether you are doing it in the school hall or the desert or a field. All you need for baptism is some water: that's all there was, after all, at the most famous baptism ever.*

*We then went on to say that if you are keen to build a church, you are **setting apart a place** (like Sunday is - or was - the setting apart of time). Otherwise, we said, build a community hall, and bring out a trestle-table. We then went on to consider the **nature of set-apart places**; and that essentially was the analysis, and then the synthesis, that went into St Paul's, Bow Common.*

*Now the fact that lots of Christian people are keen to build a church seemed to justify the activity - but why? The conclusion we came to was that the Christian community needed a domain, a place peculiar to itself that reflected its own nature and in some way re-formed it as a community constantly; a place consecrated to God; whence it is sent out into the world. You will see immediately the distinction - this the place of the Christian Body, and although public it is not secular.'*

In 1995 he re-iterated:

<sup>19</sup> *'Now, the Church does not need church buildings. What it needs is, simply, people. The people do need to gather, but they can gather in school halls and other such places. For the Eucharist, What they will need extra is some bread and some wine and some kind of cup, and preferably a table. But you can do this thing on a tree - stump in a field, a rock in a desert, a dining-table in a house, a trestle-table in a gymnasium. You do not need a special building called a church.*

*So if you decide to build a church – and people do keep deciding to – you have to see that you do it for a reason beyond mere practicality. You do it to set apart a place for worship, to consecrate it for that purpose, to make a holy place, set apart from the rest of the world. The idea is analogous that of Sunday, which is set apart in time. People have always done it. Stonehenge is a set – apart place. The idea is not particularly Christian.'*

At the heart of the manifestation of a 'set-apart place' in church architecture was the notion of a centrally-planned space. In 1998 Elaine Harwood said this:

<sup>24</sup> *"We all know the purpose of a church, which is a simple one in that it is fixed and unalterable and therefore does not involve the architect in a search for improvements in the programme he is initially set as a factory often does, or a hospital." So claimed J.M. Richards when writing of the new Roman Catholic church of St. Basil by Burles, Newton and Partners at Basildon, in March 1957. But it was not a good year to make so sweeping a statement. Having evolved in a continuous process from 1870, there were at last signs of change in the design of churches of all denominations. The refined, abstracted Perpendicular style evolved then by G .F. Bodley and George Gilbert Scott junior had informed church architecture for the next ninety years.*

*In part this was due to its universality and adaptability, in part it was because of the longevity of leading practitioners such as Sir Ninian Comper and Sir Giles Gilbert Scot - both of whom died only in 1960. Long-term projects like Liverpool and Guildford Cathedrals confirmed the supremacy of this tasteful tradition. With hindsight a subtle evolution can be seen in the planning of churches by Comper, Scott, H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, N. F. Cachemaille-Day and others, but by 1957 a younger generation was chafing to revolutionise church architecture just as they had other forms of building since the war. This revolution was not merely one of style.'*

<sup>24</sup> *'The new generation of church architects explored the fundamentals of what the denominations required, at a time when these were being questioned by the clergy and their commentators. Though the architecture parallels the development of the New Brutalism in secular work, the fundamental changes made to the religious service gives churches an underlying discipline which makes their study most rewarding. This was the Liturgical Movement.'*

*Richards' piece prompted the first appearance of the Liturgical Movement in the architectural press. This was a retort from Robert Maguire, a young architect then working for Richards on the Architects Journal, and Keith Fendall, a pseudonym of the designer Keith Murray with whom Maguire went into partnership in 1959. 'The purpose of a church is not simple .... Requirements have changed in the past and are still changing.'*

*In October 1957 there was a broadcast on the Third Programme by Peter Hammond, which was subsequently published in The Listener and the New Churches Research Group was founded. Within five years the Liturgical Movement had brought about an entire rethink on church planning in Britain, most vocally in the Church of England, most profoundly in the Catholic Church and with some of its effects imparted also to the Free Churches. By 1969 the Council for the Care of Churches could claim that all the denominations were searching for a 'common liturgical expression'. The result was that the late 1950s and early 1960s were an exceptionally inventive time for church architecture.*

*In the middle years of the twentieth century the Liturgical Movement was a major international movement aimed at popularising Christian worship. Though it centred on the Eucharist, it embodied within the Catholic tradition a nascent evangelism that has been far reaching. The word 'liturgical' is a product of the Greek 'laos'(people) and 'ergon' (work). In origin it meant any kind of public duty, and it must be stressed that the Liturgical Movement is concerned not just with the form of the Eucharist, but it is about the relationship of the congregation or 'brethren' individually and collectively, to each other and to God.'*

In October 1962, in an article for 'Church Building,' Bob Maguire had written:

***'A church building exists to serve the life of the Church. This is a statement of function. Analysis of the function of the church building formed the basis of the design of St. Paul's Church, Bow Common: we tried to gain an understanding of the life of the Church in this place in order that the building should be creative in that life.'***

There are interesting echoes here of the student project in which he showed 'function' in the movements of all the participants of the liturgy on his plan, which wasn't understood by his examiners and he was subsequently failed! And yet the irony is that here he is creating a ground-breaking church on exactly these foundations of actuality and not potential – of what **actually does happen** in a church and not what we might permit or prefer to happen!

He continued:

***'To that extent, our approach to the design of the church may be described as 'functionalist'. But any attempt to arbitrarily limit the concept of function, purpose or need to physical comfort and convenience destroys its value as a creative discipline. This we believe to be so for the design of any kind of building. It becomes particularly destructive when the building is a church.'***

*The liturgical movement has shown the dangers that exist in the failure to appreciate the relationships created and conveyed by the form and arrangement of a church. It has demonstrated that bad churches are destructive of the life of the Church. It was this recognition that convinced us that a radical approach to church design was essential. But we were also convinced that **for the building to be creative in the Church's life, it should grow out of the actual life of the real local Christian community whose needs were the reason for its existence.'***

*And so this community was not an external factor to be analysed and provided for, but played a necessary and creative part in the design process. The particular character of the building is due to the fact that it grew out of the life of this particular community at a particular time and in this particular place. Quite as much as it was conditioned by more tangible external factors such as the site and the money and techniques available.'*

<sup>6</sup> 'We have met with strong criticism on this very matter of particularity but we are still sure that a building which 'lives' now for and because of the local Christian community will continue to be 'alive' for others who follow precisely in the way that good churches built in the past still have this quality.

The alternative is a building founded on generalisations about people and their worship and created by the architect in isolation and we have found that because such buildings are not 'near to the needs' of anyone in particular, they are not meaningful to people in general ; they remain unendearing.'

In a lecture in 1995, Bob Maguire spelled out a basic principle:

<sup>18</sup> 'Now most discussions about planning for modern liturgy start with assertions about seeing well and hearing what is going on; and so, proceeding within the classic modernist rational disciplines, churches usually end up without columns (which are said to get in the way of the view) and often with plans which are wedge – shaped like lecture theatres, or half – round or nearly so like an amphitheatre, or of course (Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral being the most flagrant example) circular.

Liturgy, however, is not lecturing, nor theatre, nor is it a circus. And if one produces a building whose spatial characteristics have been developed for one of these uses, liturgy will tend to be forced down that road – it can easily become, through misunderstanding, a kind of lecture – seminar, and in particular, theatre. Throw in a fervent choir and an ambitious organist, and parish worship aspires to the Albert Hall. The nature of Christian worship is otherwise, and **the Eucharistic liturgy, as I have said, properly involves complex relationships between all present (and of course I include God in that).**

This is not solvable by rational means ... the thing cannot be worked out like the production process in a factory to produce an optimum layout (although the converse is true - you can easily make such a hash of it that it is hopeless). There are some simple rules. The presiding minister cannot greet people who are behind him: that rules out central altars, those images of perfection beloved by those who have read Wittkover too hastily. And you do need to keep down the distance between the two people furthest from each other.

None of this generates architectural form. And returning to observation as one's recourse, these complex relationships actually seem to look after themselves – **the liturgy itself being the dynamic relationship generator** – in certain kinds of interior space which, we observed, possessed a definable character. The trouble has been to find the words actually to describe this definable character.

I have opted for '**inclusive space**'. Inclusive space is a space within which, wherever a person is situated and no matter how many others are also in the space or where they are situated, that person feels included in whatever is going on.' I remember first having this conviction about an interior architectural space in the Pazzi Chapel, which also probably rates – and of course it is an absurd statement really – as my favourite building.'

## **Maguire and Murray had declared their manifesto and laid out their stall! So what did they see going on already, with a congregation without a church?**

In 2000, Maguire said:



<sup>26</sup> 'What we were trying to do at Bow Common was to create a space - to set apart a place - in which the congregation could come to perceive that they were one Body, the Mystical Body of Christ. We were concerned not to frustrate, through an inappropriate setting, the intentions of Eucharistic worship. I think it was this frustration we had felt, because of so much indifference in the buildings and churchmanship we had experienced, that gave rise to our anger.'

After the old church had first been damaged in the bombing late in 1940, the congregation of St. Paul's, Bow Common was displaced and by the time Fr. Kirkby arrived in 1951 they were worshipping in various places, including the damaged but functioning neighbouring church of St. Luke, Burdett Rd. When the War Damage Commission made its decision about rebuilding St. Paul's church, the St. Luke's building's days were

numbered, and it was very cold in winter, and it was later demolished. The congregation had been camping out in the church hall at St. Paul's Lodge. Here, very much led by Fr. Kirkby, they experimented with worship in ways allied to all his thinking, and that of the Liturgical Movement. **It was here that Maguire and Murray first met them and observed their experimental and provisional liturgical life and this became the template for the rationale of their design of the new church.**

In a paper written to me in 2013 Bob Maguire said:

*<sup>30</sup> 'In 1954, when I was asked by Father Gresham Kirkby to design the new St Paul's, and my friend & close co-worker Keith Murray commissioned to design & execute the mosaics, the community of the parish of St Paul with St Luke still reflected the traditional (social) structure (of the East End). Gresham's parishioners were a sizable, tight-knit group of people totally committed to the Church in that place and to their leader, Gresham. They had completely lost both their churches in the bombing, but they still had their church hall & the parish school, both of them worn-out Victorian buildings which they took in hand and used creatively for radical experiments in liturgy & education respectively. (They would have been utterly amazed had they known at that time that it would be their very experiments which later would lead to revolutions & reforms in both fields directly through the inspiration they imparted to the design of the two buildings they commissioned.)*

*Gresham and his people had a free hand in arranging and re-arranging the furniture for the services in the hall. You are not allowed to do this in a parish church, except in minor detail, without being granted a Faculty from the Vice Chancellor, via the Diocesan Advisory Committee. A hazardous business. None of that applies to a church hall. Gresham had come from a 'school' of radical theological thinking within the Catholic tradition in the Anglican Church, and was putting into effect his social convictions and his insights into the nature of liturgical worship; both endeared him to a faithful and enthusiastic congregation.*

*At 25, I was a dissenting, reformist Roman Catholic campaigning for Mass 'facing the people' and in the vernacular tongue, like the avant-garde in France and Germany, and for radical rethinking of church design to match; it was possibly the mutual recognition of revolutionary tendencies that sealed my appointment ... But in the 'main-line' Churches in Britain, habits of worship died hard. There was no concept of dialogue, of liturgical participation. The congregation were effectively reduced to private prayer occasionally performed in unison (as in the Creed). The usual physical stance of a member of the congregation was sitting or kneeling bowed forward with forehead resting on joined hands, often as low as the top of the pew in front. This may serve, I think, to put the radical nature of what Gresham & his people were doing into a proper perspective. For me it was a wonderful breath of fresh air, to meet not just a priest, but his whole congregation, inspired by the Holy Spirit to worship together as explicitly, demonstrably, the People of God.*

*It really is for this reason that St Paul's was revolutionary. That was all, already, in place, in the hall in which they had been worshipping. Where we came in was to interpret that extraordinary understanding of what it was all about, in terms of the physical reality of a building.'*

## **The 'First Design' of the new St. Paul's, Bow Common**

When I first learned about it I was intrigued by the fact that there had been a 'first design' which was so near and yet so far to the building we now have. The only place where I found reference to it was in Edward Mills Book of 1956, already mentioned, 'The Modern Church' and in 2009 I corresponded with Bob Maguire about this.

He wrote this in response:

*<sup>27</sup> 'The arrangement was that I would design and supervise the contract for building the church, and Keith would design and execute £8,000-worth of glass mosaics, also to be paid for by the WDC in lieu of the stained glass of the bombed church. £8,000 was an immense commission then – the whole church was valued at £50,000.'*

*We then had to convince Archdeacon Michael Hodgins at London Diocesan House that I could do the job. He agreed provided I went into association with a firm experienced in the field. When I left the AA my first, temporary, job had been with Carden & Godfrey, a firm I had previously done vacation work with to support myself; Andrew Carden had been one of my tutors at the AA. So I went back and asked them, and they agreed to support me – for a cut of the fee – and graciously undertook not to interfere with the design. That is why the 'First Design' is credited to me 'in association with Carden and Godfrey'.*

<sup>27</sup> *Keith is also credited as 'consulting designer' under his artist's alias Keith Fendall, as we were naturally in constant discussion on how to produce a building that would carry that huge amount of mosaics we were intending as an integral part of a space for Eucharistic worship. It was important to us both that the mosaics should not feel 'tacked on' but to be part of the total concept.*

*It was Keith's idea that they should depict the Heavenly Host in constant adoration, and surround the Christian people, and this seemed to go well with the idea that I had developed of a wrapped-around colonnade defining an ambulatory enclosing the central space on all four sides and this seemed to go well with the idea that I had developed of a wrapped-around colonnade defining an ambulatory enclosing the central space on all four sides. '*

## **The 'First Design' of the new St. Paul's, Bow Common ~ Compromise! Compromise!**

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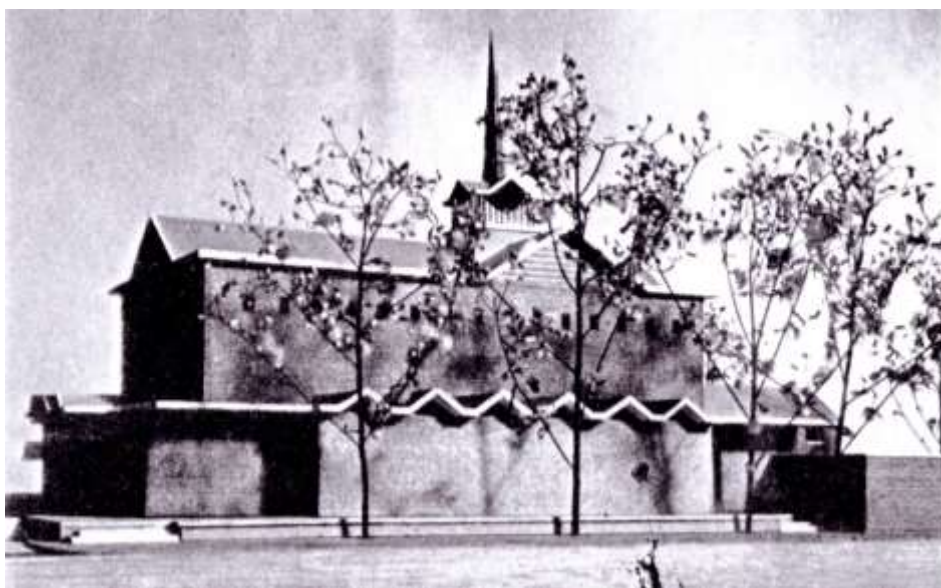
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It was quite remarkable that two such untried young (but gifted) men should be entrusted with such a commission. It was clear that this inexperience would be a factor when approval to build would finally be granted by the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and Bob Maguire was wise to heed advice given to him that he would do well to compromise on some of the details of his vision for the building.

He says this:

<sup>27</sup> '(in designing the spandrels for the mosaic Heavenly Host) ... there was slight compromise in the first design because the corner panels were not wing-spread shaped, but **many, many other things were worse compromises!** This was because Andrew Carden and Emil Godfrey gently but firmly warned me that the DAC contained Prof Corfiato and Sir Albert Richardson – both of them extremely vocal classicists – and Walter Godfrey, father of Emil and a convinced Gothic man, and that the one thing these eminent architects found they could agree on was that new churches had to be in an historic style.

"You have to take account of them, Bob, otherwise

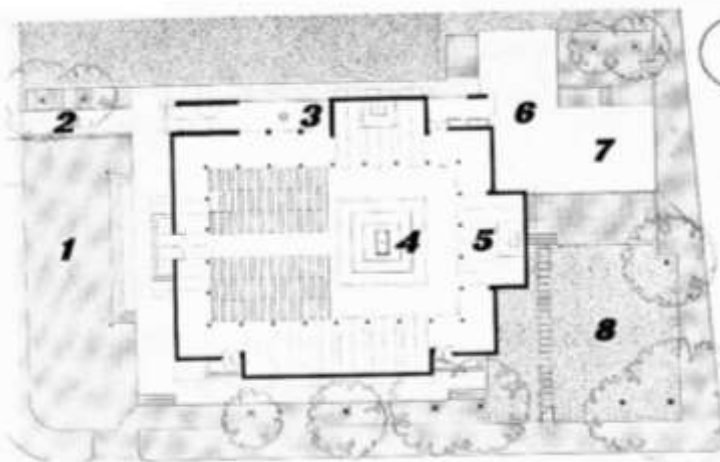


you're out", they said, "so decide what it is that's most important to achieve, and go for it, then wrap it up in something you think they might approve! The first design is the result.

key

1. forecourt
2. ramped approach
3. baptistery
4. high altar
5. sacrament chapel
6. sacristy and committee rooms
7. vicarage
8. vicarage garden

It was as far as I thought I could go, and the 'most important' thing was the plan and the internal relationships it and the section and the overhead lighting would encourage.'



It was essentially designed as an interior, somewhat but not entirely compromised by the external appearance. **But it worked; it got DAC approval.** At this point I'm yielding to the temptation to throw in the remark made by John Betjeman when he first saw the design for Coventry Cathedral, which I think is apposite here: "The spirit is willing, but the fleche is weak!"

**1 Project for a Roman Catholic Church, by Robert Maguire.** The Liturgy has always adjusted itself to the specific needs of any age while still retaining its basic form. In our own time certain needs and their corresponding liturgical adjustments are beginning to make themselves felt, and will have their effect on the church plan. This experimental project has been designed to meet the requirements of the Dialogue Mass (in which the congregation say the responses) and the Mass *versus populum* (in which the celebrant faces the congregation across the altar). The result is a square church-plan which, using the modern structural technique of pre-stressed concrete, is unencumbered by columns, except the one row around the outside which defines the processional way. In disposing the main elements within the church group, an attempt has been made to place each according to its importance and function.

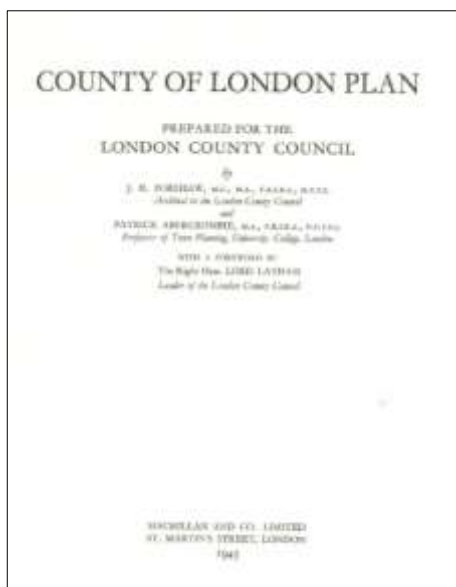
<sup>27</sup> 'The first design also received Town Planning consent. At the time the whole district had been scheduled as a (CDA) a Comprehensive Development Area under the **Abercrombie Plan** for the London area, and a great 'green wedge' was planned, stretching from outside London down to the docks, a vast park on the other side of Burdett Road, of which the present park is a pale shadow.

The London County Council area Planning Officer for the CDA was a woman named Anne McEwen, and she was the wife of a new colleague of mine at the Architectural Press, Malcolm McEwen. Malcolm and his sister Sheila Wheeler had been journalists; they both came to the AP and Sheila became my PA – the perfect PA, no-one to match her since. Of staunch Presbyterian stock and moral principles, trying hard to be an atheist, so you can imagine the interesting conversations we had. Sheila being my PA enabled me to do the job of Buildings Editor of the Architects Journal half-time and so start an architectural practice with St Paul's.'

The illustrations and titles above are from Edward Mills' book, 'The Modern Church' 1956. This is the only book in which these two schemes for a church can be found. But in correspondence with me in 2009, Bob Maguire was very clear that he did not endorse at all where Mills was 'coming from'! In a handwritten note prefacing a photocopy of an extract from Mills' book, he wrote:

<sup>1</sup> *'This is emphatically a 'pre-liturgical-movement' book, voicing all the opinions, sentiments and confident directions I was vigorously opposed to. It was largely ghost-written by Benita Cramer-Roberts, who had been a keen fellow student of mine some 3 years before its publication in 1956. Benita came to me in 1955 saying she was hard up for any really 'progressive' material from Britain, and knew of my Fourth Year scheme for a church. She couldn't publish a student's scheme (Mills would not allow it) but could I design a hypothetical 'Project' for inclusion? The result was the scheme on p 97 (as shown above) ... Benita just had time to include it before submitting the final stuff for publication.'*

## The Abercrombie Plan - the New Church to be integrated with Post-War rebuilding Plans.



<sup>27</sup> *'Anne greeted the First Design with enthusiasm - just what was wanted on that corner. The surrounding redevelopment was to be 7-storey flats in horizontal blocks enclosing planted courtyards, and I had consulted with her at an early stage to make sure that the scale of the church was in relation to that. The distinguished Town Planner, Sir*



*Patrick Abercrombie, had been appointed to prepare the County of London*

*Plan (more usually known as the Abercrombie Plan)'*

The first two pages are shown here with a glimpse on the 2<sup>nd</sup> page of the huge challenge which this Report of 1943 had to address.

Beneath this view of a ruined street the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill wrote an introduction: *'Most painful is the number of small houses inhabited by working folk which have been destroyed. We will rebuild them, more to our credit than some of them were before. London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham may have much more to suffer, but they will rise from their ruins, more healthy, and, I hope, more beautiful In all my life I have never been treated with so much kindness as by the people who suffered most.'*

In fact, plans had been drawn up as early as 1935 to rebuild 700 acres of Stepney, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, in a corridor a mile and three-quarters long and three-quarters of a mile wide between the London Docks and the Regents Canal. After the War the need here for slum clearance was exacerbated by extensive war damage.

Abercrombie and Forshaw recognised that, "There is abundant evidence that for families with children, houses are preferred to flats. They provide a private garden and yard at the same level as the main rooms of the dwelling, and fit the English temperament. "

But the area was too small; if only houses were to be built (and not overcrowded), then two-thirds or three-quarters of the people would have to move out. The planners would have liked half houses, half flats, at 100 dwellings to the acre, but even this would have created a major overspill.



This poster advertising a public meeting to learn more about the London Plan shows a kind of 'before and after' view with (interestingly) the likely kind of 7 storey housing being planned for our part of the East End and which Maguire consciously took account of in making his first design.

Bob Maguire in a paper to me (2013):

<sup>30</sup> *'The Abercrombie Plan envisaged green 'corridors' wending their way from the centre through the urban landscape to meet up eventually with the Green Belt outside the city. Between these parkland corridors, new housing would be planned on modern principles, a mixture of houses and low and high flat-blocks with much open space. It was a Utopian strategy, and involved consideration in minute detail of every local area to decide exactly what, of what had been left after bombing, to leave intact & what to demolish & start again.'*

However, to achieve this Plan communities would have to be dispersed and there were reservations which Bob Maguire also shared: <sup>30</sup> *'It was also a strategy which could involve the force of governmental authority to dictate the fortunes of local people in unacceptable ways, for the re-arrangement or often abolition of streets necessitated the moving of cohesive communities while building to rehouse them. At that date, it seems, the extent to which the street community was the essential support group for the family and the individual was unappreciated, and moving it most often meant uprooting and destroying.'*

The London Plan gave rise to estates such as the Lansbury Estate in Poplar still there today. It also included a more careful definition of the 'Green Belt'; a strip of land encircling London that is made up of parks, farmland and recreation grounds, and subject to strict regulations concerning building and development. Further out, Abercrombie proposed the construction of satellite towns around an 'Outer Country Ring'. In fact, many Londoners moved out to the eight 'New Towns' such as Stevenage and Harlow after the war.

In London the first 10-storey council housing block opened in Holborn in May 1949. High-rise housing – another Abercrombie recommendation – was touted as the solution to London's growing population, replacing housing lost during the war and London's slums. By the 1960s, over half a million new flats had been built, many of them in tower blocks.

Bob Maguire continues:

<sup>30</sup> *'Gradually, it became obvious that the strategy was not working, but causing serious breakdown of the cohesive structure of working-class society which had sustained it so beautifully during the years of blitz.'*

*... Soon after the completion of the (final design of the) church, the Abercrombie Plan was virtually abandoned, the pressure to build homes caused politicians to go for more expeditious, piecemeal planning decisions. The wide urban park on the other side of Burdett Road was slimmed down to its present size, and suddenly a previously unplanned tower block appeared alongside the church, after the clearance of most of the local street housing.*

*People were rehoused far away from their home patch – many as far away as Basildon New Town – & the indigenous, internally supportive community was dispersed. Many people lost their sense of identity; a whole society was broken. Gresham lost his parish people. He, with a few others, had virtually to start again from scratch.'*

These were tough times and hard for us, living now many decades in a socially and demographically unrecognisable East End, to imagine the huge challenges involved immediately post-War in getting a church built here at all, and subsequently maintaining one and adapting its life and function as times changed so dramatically.



Maguire makes this reflection:

<sup>30</sup> *'When I sit back and take a long view of the vicissitudes of St Paul's, and of the ways in which God's hand has been upon it, its people and its two unusually anointed vicars, of the extraordinary Christian work that has been, and is being quietly done there, I find again the only word to express my refreshed astonishment: Alleluia!'*

Bob Maguire continues:

<sup>27</sup> *'The park and the 7-storey flats all went out of the window – if I remember rightly, because of Local Authority reorganisation, political changes and the resulting abandonment of the Abercrombie Plan. What happened generally during the late 50s, the 60s and later was that tower-blocks were seized upon by politicians as a quick vote-catching solution to the shortage of housing, because you could demolish a small patch of old housing and quickly put up a very high density replacement.*

*Architects, I am ashamed to say, colluded in this and many had delusions that they were creating something like the Ville Radieuse of Le Corbusier. Of course they were totally mistaken because the inspired town planning input was lacking, the necessary parkland setting never appeared and the thing was random and opportunist. So Anne McEwen's carefully considered plan for Bow Common was discarded and the church received surroundings alien to the context it was designed for.'*

In his MA Dissertation of 1995 Donald Williamson makes this reflection:

<sup>20</sup> *'Now, looking back at his first scheme, Maguire describes how he felt that the place of worship should be "a place apart from the rest of the world." Entry was through a modest door into a memorable baptistery, where the pool-like font served not only for baptism but as a sharp reminder of the need for each to be baptised first before (literally and metaphorically) "entering the church, "with the assurance of redemption. Once inside the main body of the church, Maguire points out that (unlike the "sacred" classical temple) the columns were within, supporting the roof and creating an ambulatory. Maguire placed his altar in a radical manner with seating on three sides away from the east wall and more towards the centre of the church. His lighting was through clear glass (not stained glass - Maguire does not believe in "over-manipulating the congregation"). With regard to historical influences, Maguire avoids what he calls the compartmentalising Gothic ways, where e.g. the celebration of the Mass is removed from the people. He draws from Byzantine ways, where liturgical and spiritual focus and purpose are fused and centralised. Robert Maguire's student project was a church devised to create a new community atmosphere and "to open up possibilities".'*

## **The First Design is abandoned – the way is clear for the church we now have.**

Gerry Adler comments:

<sup>29</sup> *'The association with Carden and Godfrey established Maguire's professional bona fides, while the design in its vaguely Festival of Britain pitched-roof manner persuaded the DAC members, classicists Hector Corfiato and Albert Richardson, as well as the Gothicist Walter Godfrey, that it would give the appropriate 'ecclesiastical' stylistic signals. More important for Maguire than the disguise of stylistic clothing was the radical plan he successfully smuggled through!'*

Bob Maguire was well aware of the cost of obtaining acceptance for the first design with its many compromises which constrained his fuller vision. But what should have been a crushing blow became (in his words) a 'small miracle!

He continues:

<sup>27</sup> *'No sooner had Planning consent come through (for the first design) than the Archdeacon received news from the WDC that they had had to revalue the payment on St Paul's: it was now to be £40,000, not £50,000. My rather hazy memory of the reason given was that the part which related to St Luke's had been wrongly valued because the Victorian building was of a far lower grade of Gothic revival than St Paul's. (I may be wrong.) Michael Hodgins rang me and asked if I would go over to Diocesan House immediately to discuss what was to be done.'*

Gerry Adler tells us:

<sup>29</sup> 'Maguire's 'day job' at the time was at the Architects' Journal as Buildings Editor Working with quantity surveyors, he had been developing the practice – so familiar to us today – of cost planning, where there is a breakdown of different parts of buildings into elements so that adjustments can easily be made to the budget. Maguire was able to rejig the design, simplifying its external form, removing the spire and other features, thereby realigning the scheme with his original design intentions. The Archdeacon believed in Kirkby's vision, and this, combined with a simple card model, propelled the project through to completion.'

Bob Maguire:

<sup>27</sup> 'Now, I had been working at the AJ on a new and very sophisticated method of controlling the cost of buildings, both during design and then throughout construction. I'd been doing this in collaboration with a small team of quantity surveyors mostly from the Ministry of Education, who had started the idea in order to control expenditure over the vast programme of post-war school building. It consisted of breaking the budget down, allocating it to each separate element (foundations, external walls, waste plumbing etc.) on cost-per-sq. ft. basis so that recent buildings (my bit as Buildings Editor) could be analysed to inform the design of new buildings, irrespective of size. It meant that you could, say, decide to have a very cheap floor in order to achieve a more wonderful than usual ceiling. You were obliged to consider what you wanted from each element, do a balancing act and make the bottom line equal the budget figure alter allowing for inflation and inevitable hazards. We called it Cost Planning, and I applied it to the design of St Paul's (and every building since).

So when I met the Archdeacon I was able to go along with a new Cost Plan for a hypothetical building of the same area, using simpler materials and with less elaboration in the form of the building. I explained this but of course I didn't actually have a design for such a building. He accepted, with some reservation because no church of this size had been built to such a low budget to his knowledge (or to mine) but told me that as the DAC had passed



the first design with considerable internal disagreement, it had better look pretty much the same. I of course was looking forward to removing all the compromises I had felt obliged to make.

It was a fairly quick operation to produce the new design, because I had already mused much about what I would preferably have done. I drew a plan for the Archdeacon, but no elevations because I thought all that blank wall would frighten him.

Instead, I made a little model in plain grey card. I took these over to him for initial discussion, but he looked at the model and said that it really hadn't changed much and he didn't think it would be necessary to re-submit it to the DAC. So I then took it to Anne and she said she could take the decision 'at officer level'. **We were through!**

I got to know the Archdeacon better later on; he had a reputation for crafty manoeuvring, getting his way by stealth. But St Paul's owes its existence, in its eventual form, to what I believe was his perceptiveness and determination not to have Gresham's vision messed around with.'

Archdeacon Michael Hodgins' clear instinct that Fr. Kirkby's vision needed to be realised and that Maguire and Murray were the people to do this makes him more one more vital piece of the human jigsaw of vision, inspiration and instinct which came together to make possible the presence of this remarkable building in Bow Common. The full story of St. Paul's Bow Common relies on people such as these, who should never be forgotten.

## The new St. Paul's Bow Common begins to be built!

The Minutes of the Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council seem to make very little mention of the actual construction of the new church – in fact none at all during the period of construction. There were certain practical obstacles however, such as the demolition of the ruins of the old church and whether this would be paid for by War Funds.

Extracts from the PCC Minutes:

### 23 March 1958

*'The Vicar was going to get in touch with the contractors to find out when they would start on the **demolition** of St. Paul's.'*

### 11 April 1958 Annual Meeting

*'New Church Fr. Kirkby had been in touch with the architect. The position at the moment is that the War Damage Commission are (as usual) **quibbling over the cost of the demolition** of St. Paul's.'*



THE RUINS OF  
ST. PAUL, BOW COMMON  
1954

### 30 May 1958

*'The War Damage Commission had agreed to pay in full for the demolition of St. Paul's.'*

It would be reasonable then to suggest that work on clearing the site began during the summer of 1958 with the Foundation Stone laid on 20<sup>th</sup> December of the same year.

There was a great deal to demolish and take away. As you will see from maps later on, it is almost certain that nothing but meadow land and open country had ever stood on this site until the first church was built by William Cotton in 1858. And now the second building was about to be constructed on this spot.

In Maguire's costings for the project we see him mention that some 'extra' foundations were required, which suggests that the old church's foundations were used. I'm puzzled by the mention, though, of old 'cellars' being found as the series of old maps which

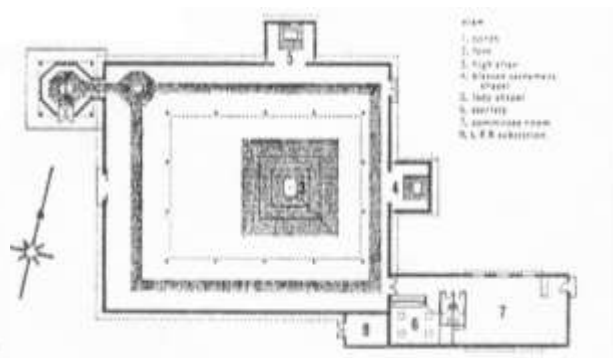
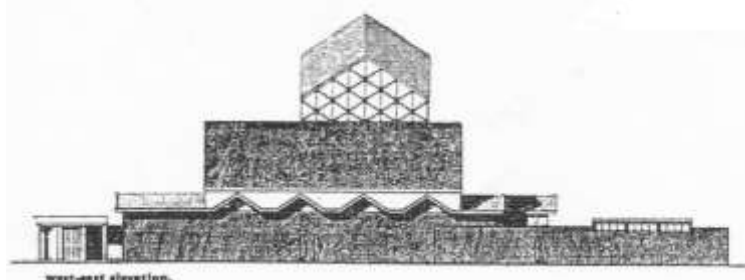
appears later suggests there were no previous buildings on this site but meadow land or rural landscape, some distance to the nearest villages of Stepney and Bow and no more than cottages out in the countryside. 'Cellars' imply grand houses such as were built, indeed, by William Cotton on that road but to the north of the church. The Vicarage was well over to the east of the church so they would not have belonged there either. I have never seen any mention of a crypt under the old church but maybe there was some underground construction? No records remain.

## Commentaries published as the church was being built.

What was being built at Bow Common was of great interest within the architectural community and was being critiqued even during construction. In 1958 Peter Hammond wrote this:

### A Liturgical Brief: Peter Hammond 1958

2



<sup>2</sup> *'The prospect for church architecture on this side of the Channel is at the moment somewhat cheerless. It is to be feared that, as the ecclesiastical authorities begin to grasp the revolutionary notion that it is traditional to be modern, we may expect to see still more examples of what are essentially medieval churches masquerading rather self-consciously in contemporary fancy dress. There are, nevertheless, some grounds for hoping that the next ten years will see an increasing awareness of the real character of the problems confronting the church architect.'*

*Robert Maguire's new church at Bow Common may well prove to be of far greater importance than any church built in this country since St. Philip's, Cosham. It is the outcome of a systematic application of functional analysis to the problems of church design; the unusual plan springs from an attempt to relate the altar to the priest and people in such a way that they can best carry out their functions in the liturgy.'*

*This unpretentious parish church promises to be a notable landmark in the development of church architecture in this country. One of the main factors in the renewal of sacred art on the Continent has undoubtedly been the existence of enlightened ecclesiastical patronage: in France, for example, the Dominican Order has played a crucial role. In this country, on the other hand, it may well be that the initiative will come from the architect. I see no reason why an informed architect should not exercise upon an ecclesiastical client the kind of salutary influence that he has already brought to bear upon the Ministry of Education. The new church at Bow Common shows that it can be done, provided the architect knows what he is doing. If the principles of the modern movement have any validity they are applicable to the design of churches as well as schools. If this were more generally realized in architectural circles in this country we should be well on the way to a more rational approach to the problems of church building.'*

Two years later, in his important book, **'Liturgy and Architecture' 1960, Peter Hammond** wrote:

<sup>3</sup> **'ST. PAUL, Bow Common, LONDON:** *A church of outstanding promise, which is essentially a building for corporate worship, by a young architect who has been trying for several years to formulate a functional programme for church design, and who is convinced that the new insights of the liturgical movement demand 'a complete rethinking of the emblems of church planning'.*

*The Plan of this church has, in his own words, 'grown from an attempt to relate the altar (considered as the principal symbol of our Lord in the church) to the priest and people in such a way that they can best carry out their functions in the liturgy'. The plan of the church is extremely simple: a rectangle almost as broad as it is long.*

*The altar, with its ciborium, is placed beneath a large glazed lantern which provides the main source of illumination. The sanctuary is further defined by special paving, as is the processional way which surrounds the central space on all sides beyond the colonnade. The congregation will enter the church through the octagonal porch in the north-west corner, passing through the baptistery. There is also a processional west door.*

*Behind the high altar, on the main axis of the church, there is a small chapel for the reserved sacrament. There is a Lady Chapel opening off the processional way to the north of the sanctuary, and the organ is on the west wall. There will be no fixed seating in the church and the position of the pulpit is to be decided in the light of experience.*

*This is a church of far greater importance than its unpretentious character might suggest. It is a true domus ecclesiae, planned from the altar outwards. It may well prove to be something of a landmark in the re-creation of a living tradition of church architecture in this country. The foundation stone was laid in December 1958, and the church is to be consecrated in April, 1960.'*

In December 1960, in a preface to Maguire and Murray's article in the Architectural Review **Rayner Banham** said this:

<sup>5</sup> *'To regard the Liturgical Movement as a most promising new source of valid forms in church architecture, is to miss its point completely. It is clear that many entrants in the recent Liverpool Cathedral did regard it in this light, and adopted what they believed to be liturgical forms. But, as readers of the Reverend Peter Hammond's pioneer article in AR April 1958 will know, even without reading his more recent book Liturgy and Architecture, nothing formal or stylistic is advocated by the Liturgical Movement.'*

<sup>5</sup> 'Rather it postulates a complex of spatial and functional relationships between priest and congregation, the ritual and the instruments of ritual. It sees the liturgy as an exchange of actions between priest and people, not as a passive spectator/actor relationship such as is implicit in arena planning of the sort often mistaken for liturgical. If there is a tendency to centralised planning under liturgical leadership, it derives simply from the difficulty of taking an active part in anything if one is too far away from it. The church of **St. Paul, Bow Common**, the first notable representative of liturgical planning in Britain, illustrated on the next five pages, has a roughly centralised space only, and is planned in concentric zones, within which the congregation can almost be regarded as mobile, since the seating is not fixed.

The Liturgical Movement does not offer the architect forms, it sets him a double functional problem to be resolved in a single solution: to create a functional space – part of the usable space of the parish – to house the priest and congregation in the celebration of the ritual, and a symbolic space – part of the universal space of the kingdom of God – to house the altar, the symbol of Christ's presence among God's people. This double objective might be achieved by applying symbols to a functional structure, but that would simply be window-dressing. **The outcome is only architecture if the functional and symbolical are indissoluble.**

The visitor - better, worshipper - can be left to judge for himself how far this is true of St. Paul's; the reader who must judge it by photographs and plans may need some guidance. The building offers a space which gives the congregation freedom, but without being imprecise or vague. The structural form which houses the space is at one with its symbolic meaning. Thus, the outer ambulatory is defined by the row of columns which support the lower roof, and by the brick paving laid to withstand the wear caused by ambulation.

The central space, for worship, is defined by the columns and the higher roof; the seating is movable, but the altar, properly, is fixed within a sanctuary defined by the hanging corona and the great skylight above. The altar is raised, not only for sight-lines but also on steps that correspond to a liturgical hierarchy, but there is no altar rail – the zone where communicants kneel is indicated by brick paving. Once more, laid to withstand the wear caused by kneeling.

Usages such as this accord very well with the dictum that well-designed objects contain, in their very forms instruction about their mode or use, and these changes of floor-surface make St. Paul's recognisable as a well-designed artefact even by those who know nothing of the Liturgical Movement. The point is worth making because it underlines once more that the Liturgical Movement relieves the architect of neither functional nor formal responsibilities. It sets a programme, and the architect's task is to make a building to satisfy the programme & his building will be architecture, or not, in accordance with the way he satisfies it.

The justifications of the Liturgical Movement are religious. Its interest for the architect lies in the kind of brief it will give him when he is asked to design a church – not vaguely emotive in the recent atmospheric manner, not fanatically precise over trivia, as with the Ecclesiologists of the last century, **but concerned with functions and people.**

Such a brief, while in no way impairing the religious qualities of the building – quite the other way about – puts the conceptual stages of church design on the same intellectual and imaginative footing as applies in the most forward areas of secular architecture at present. Peter Hammond, in *Liturgy and Architecture*, makes a specific comparison with the post-war schools building programme, but he might, with even greater force, have cited the Nuffield Trust's work on hospital planning and design, where psychological, if not spiritual considerations have been given their due at last, alongside the functional and mechanical.

To propose such comparisons may seem shocking to some sincere churchmen and religious architects, but the liturgical approach does enable today's architects to tackle church design without feeling – as has so often been the case – that they are abandoning the moral fundamentals of their architecture, based on truth and honesty in material and function, and elapsing into a theatrical pseudo-mysticism. As a result, St. Paul's can serve the needs of the Church without ceasing to be a modern building. Modern, that is, not in terms of current decorative clichés, structural acrobatics or fashionable formalisms, but modern in the sense of the hard core of moral conviction that holds together any number of formal and structural concepts on the basis of what Lethaby called 'nearness to need.'

Following Banham's introduction above, this article in the **Architectural Review of December 1960 is Maguire and Murray's earliest account of the building** only consecrated some eight months previously. Interesting clues are given of the intended and expected context for the church in what was clearly intended for a rebuilt post-war neighbourhood:

<sup>5</sup> *'St. Paul's, Bow Common is at parish church built on the site (in Burdett Road, Stepney) of a Victorian Gothic church destroyed in the war. It is within an LCC comprehensive development area, and most of the two- and three-storey terrace houses near the church are due to be redeveloped, in part by multi-storey flats, and the fact that the church will eventually be over-topped by neighbouring housing was borne in mind by the architect when determining its scale and character. The latter is designed to possess some of the toughness of traditional East End building and townscape.*

*The area across Burdett Road from the church will become a public open space and it is probable that St. Paul's Way (bounding the site on the south) will at this point be closed to traffic and remain as a paved pedestrian street. Later, a church school will be built to the east of the new church. Leopold Street, at present forming the eastern boundary, will then disappear. A new vicarage has also still to be built alongside the church, near the north-east corner.'*

The public open space was realised but none of rest of these plans came into being and, some fifty years after the church was built much of the surrounding neighbourhood was radically redesigned during widespread regeneration. The church somehow seems to hold its own through a second round of reconfiguration of its context beyond the intended building programme which never did take place.

They go on to give their earliest description of the new church now built and in use:

<sup>5</sup> *'The church is designed to suit the requirements of a parish that had already developed a strong liturgical tradition and had experimented with various internal arrangements in two buildings which it had previously occupied temporarily. The whole shape and character of the interior, considered three-dimensionally, were evolved from the church's liturgical practice (see the introductory article on page 400); in particular the placing of the altar within the high central space beneath the lantern with seating on three sides of it. This seating is in the form of portable four-seater benches, which allow the arrangement to be varied. A small congregation can fill the central area and avoid a feeling of numerous seats being empty; larger congregations can expand into the surrounding, lower-ceilinged areas as required.*

*The freestanding sanctuary is defined by a hanging corona of black – painted rolled steel sections, bearing candles; also by a change in floor-texture from precast flags to white flint bricks. A path of similar bricks also marks a processional way round the perimeter of the building outside the columns that support the clerestory wall. The altar is raised on two steps, creating three levels corresponding to the hierarchic distinctions within the Anglican Church and the font is placed in its traditional symbolic position near the entrance used by the congregation. This is at the north-west corner, by way of an octagonal porch with a square roof resting on four external pillars. There are also large sliding doors at the west for the congregation leaving church and for wedding and other processions.*

*There are two small chapels (a Lady Chapel on the north side and another on the east), both outside the main liturgical space. An organ on the west clerestory wall will later replace the temporary instrument seen in 8 (page 405), but the console will remain in the position of the latter. The sacristy occupies a low wing projecting from the south-east corner of the building. This also contains a parish meeting-room with kitchen recess, lavatories and an electrical sub-station.*

*External walls are of load-bearing purple-grey Uxbridge flint bricks with recessed joints, laid in Monk bond which, with a 13 ½ in. wall, provides continuous rectangular vertical spaces in the thickness of the wall. The rainwater drainage is contained in these spaces so that no plumbing appears on the face of the building. The internal columns are 12in. diameter reinforced concrete, cast in cardboard tubes. The aisle roofs are also reinforced concrete, fairfaced from plywood shuttering in 4ft. squares. These conform to the 4ft. module on which the whole plan is based, enabling the 2ft. paving squares, for example, to meet the walls without cutting. The aisle roofs take the form of folded slabs 4in thick resting on a continuous concrete sill on top of the aisle wall which also acts as a tie. The clerestory beam is an upstand from the aisle roofs and consists of a series of linked double cantilevers. A groove in its upper surface takes electric cables with outlets to the nave light-fittings.*

The nave roof has steel lattice-beams (a diagrid concrete structure was first chosen but steel was substituted in the belief that it would be more economical) and a timber ceiling faced with white-painted asbestos acoustic tiles. The roof covering is asphalt with marble chips and aluminium flashings. The lantern is of welded steel, painted dark blue and double glazed. It has a ceiling of wood-wool painted green and an aluminium-covered roof. Aisle windows are steel, also painted blue, with clear sheet glass. The porch has a frameless plate-glass strip between the concrete slab roof. Heating is by forced warm air from 16 electric heaters in eight pits sunk in floor, each pit having an inlet and an outlet grille.

# War-wrecked church is being rebuilt

**RESURGAM**—"We Shall Rise Again." So say parishioners in Bow who are eagerly looking forward to the time when the new St. Paul's Church, Burdett Road, is completed.

On Saturday, standing on the windswept site where once the old church stood, they saw the Bishop of Stepney (The Right Rev. Francis Lunt) lay the foundation stone of the new church, which is expected to be ready by October next year.

The Bishop entered the site in procession, accompanied by the Vicar, the Rev. R. G. Kirkby, and the Rector of Stepney (Rev. C. E. Young). A number of building workers watched the short, impressive service.

Against a background of concrete-mixers, bricks and mortar, the Bishop performed the act of laying the foundation stone and made the sign of the Cross over it with a trowel.

While mason Mr. Robert Sage and Mr. John Haigh laid the mortar, more than 20 parishioners answered the Psalm: "Jacob rising up in the morning, set up a stone for a sign; and pouring on oil, vowed a vow unto the Lord."

### HANDSHAKES

After the service, the Bishop shook hands with the parishion-

ers and then went to the trenches in the site to shake hands with the building workers. There followed a service in nearby St. Barnabas' Hall, Rowsell Street, which has been converted into a temporary church.

Foreman carpenter Mr. John Haigh told an "Advertiser" reporter that the coloured stones which were much admired in the old church will be used in the foundation for the new St. Paul's, which is expected to cost about £45,000.

Mr. Robert Maguire is the architect of the building, which will be square-shaped with a free-standing High Altar near the centre and with two small chapels leading off the east and north aisles.

### SIMPLICITY

Main theme of the new church is centred on simplicity with an avoidance of Gothic design.

The chief approach will be by an octagonal porch and a main west entrance, containing two sliding doors, will be for processional purposes. It is inten-

ded to have an organ suspended on the west wall.

Immediately above the High Altar will be a lantern, 32 feet square and 60 feet from the ground. People who have seen the drawing of the new church say this feature is most impressive. Daylight will come from a mosaic canopy over the altar and from windows round the side aisles.

### WILL HOLD 500

It is planned to use the timber from the existing pews in St. Luke's Church for conversion into four-seater short pews in the new church, which will hold 500 people.

Parishioners, at the moment, worship at St. Barnabas Hall, Rowsell Street, converted into a temporary church following the closing of St. Luke's Church, Burdett Road, with which St. Paul's was linked.

The new church will be one of the most modern in London. The old church, now completely demolished, stood for a century. It was wrecked by enemy action during the last war.

A date was set for the **laying of the Foundation Stone**. This stone can still be seen from the street just above ground level at the south-west corner of the church. The local newspaper cutting above reports on this just a few days later. Almost certainly the stone was carved by Ralph Beyer. For me one of the Maguire and Murray church buildings which has the nearest feel to St. Paul's, Bow Common is the Benedictine Community Chapel of West Malling Abbey in Kent (1964-66).

Their much larger Foundation stone by Ralph Beyer is very close in design to that at Bow Common and being protected from the elements still shows the incisions picked out in paint as I'm sure was the case at Bow Common and is recorded as being so, somewhere that I have read. The 'signature' colour used by Maguire and Murray for all on Beyer's carved work at Bow Common, and also for the fascia at the top of the glazed lantern was called 'Bull's Blood'! A very evocative name and echoing the grittiness and hard-edge of the building's meaning!



The Bishop arrives flanked by Fr. Kirkby & curate, Fr. John Rowe





A sandstone was used for the Foundation Stone and it is delightful that when you look at it closely you can see some tiny fossils and remnants of profoundly past ages. For me, that too is a deeply connecting thing that this radical 'new' creation is actually earthed and connected to a far greater history than just this passing moment.

It was the building company, Bovis, who held the construction contract. Bob Maguire remembers this: <sup>27</sup> 'The Cost Planning' team who worked

*There may have been a blessing of the whole site of the church with me at the Architects Journal included Peter Trench, who was Managing Director of Bovis Ltd., at that time a medium-sized firm of builders who had invented a system of costing buildings in which they gave an initial estimate of basic cost, free of profit, and a fee they would charge for the job. They then kept open books, and the client paid the actual cost in labour and materials (being informed at monthly intervals of how this compared to the original estimate, so that changes of mind could be made if necessary) and if the cost came out greater than the estimate, the fee remained the same. The intention being that Bovis had no interest in claims for extras on a contract price. Peter Trench was a person of integrity, and I decided to use Bovis to build the church. The system worked.'*

The photographs which follow are the surviving record of that day  
**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December 1958 at 11 am.**

The Bishop of Stepney who consecrated the Foundation Stone was the **Rt. Revd. Everard Lunt**, a serious but good and godly man, and it was he who, almost exactly 6 years later would confirm me at my home church of St. John-at-Hackney in the neighbouring borough in the East End!

Fifty years to the day and to the minute, also a Saturday, on **20<sup>th</sup> December 2008 at 11 am**

a small group of us gathered to re-dedicate the Stone, mostly current church members but also three people from the past including Mary McKenzie, still a church member from those days.



*The building site*

When I looked at the photographs carefully I realised that we still had and were still using certain items used on that day – a holy water bowl and sprinkler, a thurible for burning incense, a processional cross and a church banner. These were concrete witnesses to that day and so we used them again 50 years later to the very minute.



*The Foundation Stone is consecrated*

Before we processed out of the church to rededicate the Foundation Stone I took the congregation to see these mementos of that day and explained to them what they were and that we would be using them again.

To my complete amazement, one of the past church members there, Julian Edwards, then revealed that he was the young boy of 15 we see in the photographs carrying the cross! He agreed to carry it again to the same spot exactly 50 years later – a small but amazingly powerful connection to that day of the

genesis of St. Paul's, Bow Common! How often in our lives do we ever manage to come full circle to doing the same thing 50 years later?

Another similarly resonance event occurred in 2012 when the then current Bishop of Stepney, the Rt. Revd. Adrian Newman, who was consecrated a bishop just days earlier, came to dedicate the newly refurbished church hall at St. Paul's, Bow Common. He saw the display in church of the church's history and noticed that he had brought back to the church the same Bishop's pastoral staff as used by Bishop Lunt (and as seen in the photographs)!

When they knew Bishop Adrian was going to be consecrated bishop, Bishop Lunt's family made a gift to him of their father's pastoral staff - and here it was **again!**

Even more extraordinarily, as the bishop observed the date of the consecration of our Foundation Stone, he realised that it was carried out on the very day before he was born!



*Fr. John Rowe / Bishop Everard Lunt*

*Fr. Gresham Kirkby*



*The Foundation Stone is moved into place*



*(Note the ↑ young Bob Maguire!) The Stone is set in place*





# Bishop lays foundation stone of new church

**T**HE Bishop of Stepney, the Rev. Francis Evered Lunt, laid the foundation stone of the new church of St. Paul's, Bow.

The old church was destroyed during the last war, and the new building is being constructed on the corner of St. Pauls-way and Burdett-road, near to the former site.

Designed by Robert Maguire, the church will be one of the

Watched by some of the future congregation, the Bishop of Stepney, the Rev. Francis Evered Lunt, lays the foundation stone of the new St. Paul's Church, Bow, assisted by the vicar, the Rev. Kirby and some of the clergy.

most contemporary in the district.

Outstanding in the new design is a large, square dome above the main church building.

Car parks will utilise the remaining space around the church.

The building is scheduled to be completed by the second week in October 1960.



*The Foundation Stone is finally and truly laid.*

*This ▲ gifted young man was the foreman of the bricklayers!*

Fifty years later, to the day and to the minute, we gathered to rededicate the Foundation Stone.





The four people shown above were present on the day of the laying of the Foundation Stone, **Mary MacKenzie** (in red) still being a church member! **Julian Edwards** is shown beside her, carrying the same cross he carried to the same place exactly 50 years earlier, aged 15! The banner carried on that day was also used at the re-dedication of the Stone. Tiny fossil shell fragments can be seen in both faces of the Stone itself.



*Re-Dedication of the Foundation Stone: Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2008 at 11 am*

## ST. PAUL'S BOW COMMON IS BUILT!

Alas, there is no record that I have been able to trace of the actual construction of the church, either photographic or written. The larger newspaper cutting above, of December 1958 mentions that the building was scheduled for completion in October 1959 whereas the smaller cutting sets the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of October 1960 as the completion target! The few of our oldest church members who witnessed all of this have confirmed that the church was indeed in use late in 1959, although not consecrated until 30<sup>th</sup> April 1960.

Again, sadly, the PCC Minutes provide no running commentary during this period of building, completion of building works and early use up to the Consecration. As mentioned earlier, from the time when demolition was probably taking place (July 1958) through to 8 Feb. 1959 there is no record of any PCC Meetings and the only buildings-related item briefly mentioned is the possible sale of the old organ stored since the bombing in St. Luke's Church and then moved elsewhere. The sale of it was a vital contribution to the provision of a new organ in the new church. No Annual Church Meeting is recorded for 1959 but the meeting in April has this interesting little fund-raising suggestion:

### **24 April 1959**

*'Appeal: It was suggested that we should (go) round the parish selling bricks on Friday evenings and ask the people if they would like to have a collection box.'*

As the building nears completion in October 1959 there is this note:

### **16 October 1959**

*'It was suggested by Fr. Rowe that we should have a meeting soon after the Bazaar to discuss the interior decoration of the church, and ask Bob and Keith Murray down.'*

There are no meetings for the next 4 months and then in February 1960 the Consecration is being planned only two months away.

### **17 February 1960**

*'Appeal: The Appeal Fund now stands at £919.7s.1d (including Post office account) and we expect to reach our aim of £1000.0.0d by the time of the consecration on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1960.'*

*Heating in the new church: It was suggested by Mrs. Walden that we start a fund for heating in the new church. Each member of the congregation should give 6d a week towards the fund which will be run by Mr. Edwards.*

*Consecration: It is almost certain that the Consecration will be held on **Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1960 at 7.00 pm**. Invitations are being printed and all those people connected with the church be sent one. It was suggested that a leaflet should be printed, and that every house in the parish should receive one. M. Walden will design the leaflet. It was also suggested that a week of celebrations should follow the Consecration, and that people in the parish would be invited to visit the church on any evening during that week, and that one of the members of the congregation should be on hand to answer any questions they may ask.'*

### **21 April 1960 Annual Meeting (Nine days before the Consecration)**

*'Consecration: **The Bishop of London will preside at the consecration.** It was suggested by Fr. Kirkby that there be an all-night vigil of prayer, on the Friday night prior to the consecration. Fr. Kirkby also suggested that during the week following the consecration there should be sung mass on Wednesday and Friday evenings. Immediately following the consecration refreshment will be served in the school hall.'*

I have seen Fr. Kirkby's own explanation for the date of Consecration – that the International Workers' Day – or 'Labour Day' – was on May 1<sup>st</sup> (Since 1955 it was also the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker) and he wished for the church to be dedicated as close as possible to that significant date!

In his 'Church Building' article of 1962, Bob Maguire ended his account of the building with some costings and also with a tribute to the work force who built the church.

*<sup>6</sup> 'This result could have been impossible without the co-operation of an excellent general foreman and a building team who entered into the spirit of the work. Among these the foreman bricklayer (who was 24) was an out-standing craftsman, and the brickwork of this building is better than any we have seen in recent years.'*

For me, as well as the great names we have considered should also be included people such as that young foreman of the bricklayer (who is identified in a photograph a few pages earlier). His skill and standards were exceptional and the quality of the brickwork wherever you look in the building is its (not so) hidden glory. Were the brickwork set to a poorer quality the building could have looked shabby or an embarrassment. With such expanses of brick defining its appearance the skills of this man and his team were crucial. Both inside and out there is a wonder of uniformity which I admire enormously. I had heard stories (I think from Keith Murray) of how, young as he was, he would have no hesitation in taking men off the job who were twice his age if their work did not satisfy his high standards.

It is faultless throughout and is of an unusual bond called 'Monk Bond.' I remember standing outside the church with two young visiting architects, one of whom had a degree of autism. Some people with autism have an enhanced visual perception which can be hugely focused on standards of detail. In the middle of our conversation he broke off and walked up to the brick face of the church just by the main doors, laid his arms and face against it and with closed eyes absorbed the perfection of the brick patterning in a way the other two of us would be quite unable to do. It was a remarkable experience to see the quality of the craftsmanship of the church through his eyes and giftedness.

When we had the major celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the consecration of the church in 2010 I twice wrote to Bovis, at high level and also at office level to ask about the whereabouts of the foreman brickie, now in his 70's and (someone who seemed to know told me) still very much alive and active. I especially wanted him to see what he had helped create 50 years on and to fete him as one of the heroes of the event. Alas, neither letter ever received the courtesy of a reply. Presumably dismissed as some strange Vicar barking on about something or after some favour! They didn't seem to appreciate what a credit to Bovis that man had been. Standards change, maybe.

Just two years after completion of the building, Bob Maguire made this summary of costs:

*<sup>6</sup> 'The inexpensive materials used in the church were a stimulus. They have a part in the relationship between this church and the place and people. In trying to use ordinary industrial materials well, we have been concerned to affirm the intrinsic value of cheap, good materials and good work. The use of some rich materials is part of the same concept; they affirm by their relationship to the simple materials the value of both. They are intended to "sing" together, setting each other off.'*

### **Cost.**

*The following are final account figures:*

Church, including porch and meeting room	£40,970
Outside works (pavings, walls, fences, etc.)	£ 2,516

*The cost of the building includes some £1,000 for extra foundations due to the discovery of old cellars on the site.*

*The cost of outside works is perhaps a rather higher proportion of the total than is usual, and is accounted for by the very long road frontages: there are roads on three sides of the site.*

*The following figures are in the form used in cost analyses in the Architects' Journal:*

Total floor area (inside external walls)	9,503 sq. ft.
Cost per sq. ft. of floor area	86s. 3d.

For purposes of comparison, readers may find the following information valuable:

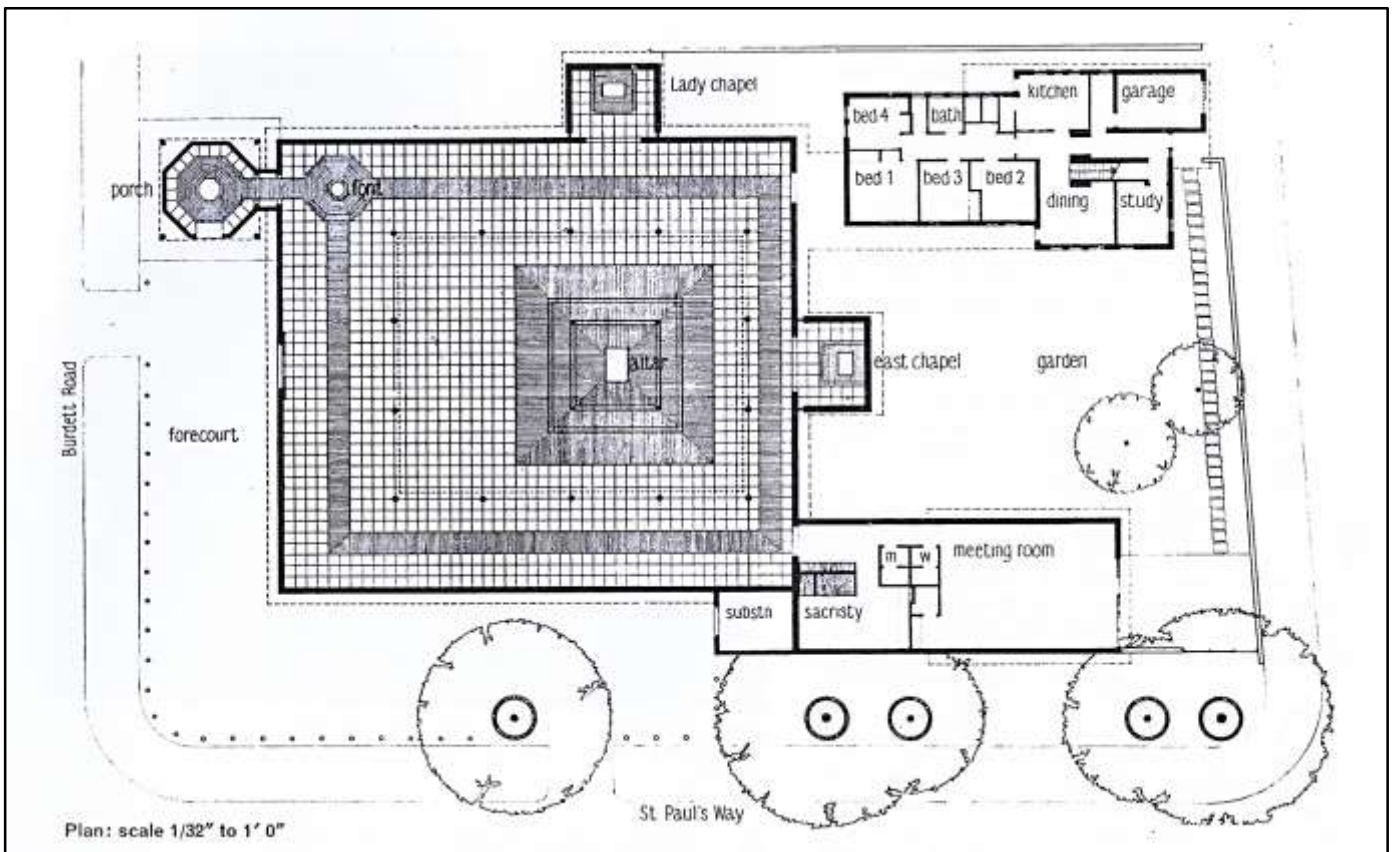
Number of "places"	500
Cost per "place"	£ 82
Floor area of main church per "place"	15.4 sq. ft.
Cube of total building	270,250 cu. ft.
Cost per ft. cube	3 s
Height to main roof	37 ft.
Height to top of lantern	60 ft.

So far as we can at the moment ascertain (there is almost no detailed information published on this) the cost per "place" is well below the national average for Anglican churches, while the floor area per "place" is considerably more generous than average.'



This view is possibly the earliest that there is of the newly built church, from either late in 1959 or early in 1960. There is no notice board on the church as yet and also no ropes have not so far been fitted to the two church bells – both a sign that the building is not yet formally in use.

It is also interesting to see the houses beyond the church which would soon be replaced by an enormous tower block!





**SATURDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1960 ~ 7 PM**  
**THE CONSECRATION AND DEDICATION OF ST. PAUL'S, BOW COMMON**  
**BY THE BISHOP OF LONDON,**  
**THE RT. REVD. HENRY MONTGOMERY CAMPBELL**



The Bishop strikes the main door three times with his pastoral staff to seek admittance.

The Bishop blesses and consecrates the new building with holy water.



The Bishop goes in procession around the perimeter of the church to bless the building.

# ~ The Order of Service ~

## CONSECRATION and DEDICATION

of  
**ST. PAUL'S**  
Bow Common

Saturday, 30th April, 1960

at 7 p.m.

by  
The Lord Bishop of London

### THE CONSECRATION OF ST. PAUL'S

#### Bow Common

#### 1. THE PETITION (In the Church Room)

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, who has bestowed upon Thy Bishops such preeminence of grace, that whatsoever they do and perfectly do in Thy Name is taken to be done by Thee; we now beseech Thee of Thy great kindness to visit whenever we shall visit, and bless whatever we shall bless; and that at His our entry here all evil may vanish and the angels of peace take possession. Through our Lord JESUS CHRIST, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, world without end. R. Amen.

The Procession, during which outside walls are sprinkled Psalm 24 (German: Setting) The earth is the Lord's, and its fullness.

#### 2. THE ENTRANCE

(All Stand) The Antiphon is sung: Open wide O you gates eternal, and let the King of Glory enter (German) and the Bishop kneels three times.

Deacon: Who is the King of Glory?

Bishop: The Lord of Hosts he is the King of Glory.

PEACE be to this House from God, our heavenly Father.

PEACE be to this House from his Son, who is our Peace.

PEACE be to this House from the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Prayer: ENTER, O Lord, we beseech thee, this House which is built to thy glory, that it may be hallowed by thine abiding presence, and within the hearts of thy faithful people establish thyself an everlasting habitation, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. Amen.

Procession: Psalm 122. I was glad (Men and Women alternating)

#### 3. THE DEDICATION

(Kneel) Hymn 153: Your Creator Spiritus.

The Signings on the Pavement.

(Stand) Sprinkling of the inside walls. Psalm 91.

Prayer: ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who, though the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, much less a house made with hands, yet hast promised to be present where two or three are gathered together in thy name: Accept, we beseech thee,

this our bounden duty and service, and because holiness becometh this house for ever, surely with thy gracious presence this House which is built for thy honour and glory. Let thine eyes be open towards it night and day; let thine ears be inclined to the prayers of thy children; and let thy heart delight to dwell herein perpetually; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

GOD the Father, God the Son God the Holy Ghost, accept, mercifully, and bless this place to be a sanctuary of the most high and a church of the living God. The Lord with his favour ever mercifully behold it, and so send down upon it his special benediction and grace, that it may be the House of God to him, and to the gaze of heaven. Amen.

#### 4. THE CONSECRATION

The Preface and Solemn Act of Consecration, and the Consecration of the Altar.

V. The Lord be with you.

R. And with Thy spirit.

V. Lift up your hearts.

R. We lift them up unto the Lord.

V. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

R. It is meet right so to do.

Bishop:

It is very meet right and our bounden duty that we should always and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, holy Father Almighty, everliving God; We pray Thee: heed our prayers and sacramental offerings, heed the labours of Thy servants who seek Thy mercy. May Thy Holy Spirit with seven-fold gift come down upon this Thy Church, which we unworthily consecrate to Thee, in honour of the holy Cross wherein Thy everlasting Son, our Lord Jesus Christ suffered for the redemption of the world, and as a memorial of our Lady. Unto all who in this place join their prayer to Thee do Thou grant fulfilment of all that they ask. O blessed and holy Trinity who dost purify, cleanse and beautify all things! O blessed Trinity of God who dost fill, contain and direct all things! O blessed and holy Hand of God, we humbly and devoutly stretch Thy mercy. Deeply to purify, cleanse and consecrate with the absolution of Thy holiness this Thy Church. Mercifully may Thy priests offer unto Thee the sacrifice of praise, and Thy faithful people pay the most of Thy Worship. Mercifully may the burden of sin be absolved and

the fallen uplifted. In this Thy house, O Lord, may the grace of Thy Holy Spirit restore all so health and strength. Hearken to the intercessions of Thy faithful people here offered, and grant their petitions, that they may evermore praise Thee and magnify Thee.

Through the same Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the same Holy Ghost throughout all ages world without end. Amen.

The Altar is sprinkled - Thou shalt purge me O Lord with hyssop and I shall be clean; thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Prayer: Having in remembrance the one oblation once offered for our redemption upon the Altar of the Cross, which was fore-shadowed when the Patriarch Jacob set up a stone for a pillar of sacrifice and they divine voice resounded through the gates heaven laid open from on high: we humbly beseech thee, O Lord, that so of old thou didst thyself inscribe the law in tables of stone, so now thou wouldest endue with the fulness of thy sanctification this altar fashioned and prepared for the high and holy sacrifice, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God, the creator and sacrificer of all things visible and invisible, vouchsafe we beseech thee, to be present at the hallowing of this thy table; and as we in our unworthiness anoint and bless it with holy Oil and Chrism, do thou pour forth upon it the power and consecration of thy benediction; to the end that all who come hither to impleat thy mercy may know the succour thy gracious and ready help. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Altar is anointed.

The Anointing with Oil of Chrism.

May this stone be consecrated and consecrated; in the Name of the + Father, and of the + Son, and of the + Holy Ghost, in honour of God and of Saint Paul. Amen.

The Vesting of the Altar and anointing of side Altars - Psalm 64 (Plainchant)

The Blessing of the ornaments.

Grant, O Lord, that these gifts, which are here dedicated to thee by our office and ministry, may be hallowed for thy service and forever set apart from all common and profane uses; through thy mercy, O blessed Lord God, who dost live and govern all things, world without end. Amen.

The anointing of the Twelve Crosses - Hymn 169; Blessed City Heavenly Salem (singing Doxology and adding 170)

#### 5. THE SENTENCE OF CONSECRATION

(Stand) Good people, by virtue of our sacred office in the Church of God, we do now declare to be consecrated, and forever set apart from profane, common, and ordinary uses this House of God, under the dedication of St. Paul, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Here, O Lord, let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and thy saints sing with joyfulness; here let thy priests offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; here let the people pay their vows unto the most High and offer their free-will offerings with an holy worship; here let the bonds of sin be loosed, and life-giving pardon received; that here by the word of absolution the penitent may be freed and restored; that here those who come to be joined together in Holy Matrimony may be blessed and hallowed; here let thy servants find support in their trials, and a refuge in their distress; and here in thy holy name be for ever worshipped and adored through thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath taught us thus to pray.

Bishop and People: Our Father which art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name; thy Kingdom come; thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm: O give thanks to the Lord for He is good.

Chorus: Great is his love, love without end.

#### 6. THE SERMON

#### 7. CONCLUSION

Hymn 127: Allotya, allotya, hearts to heaven and voices raise.

The General Thanksgiving.

The Blessing

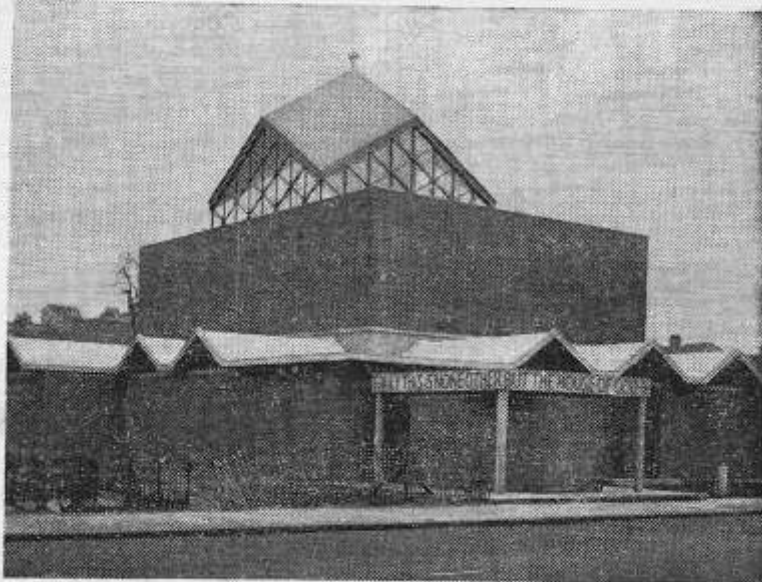
+

*Richard Robert Rogers  
Assistant Vicar  
Trinity Cathedral, Ipswich, Essex, Eng.*

APRIL 22, 1960

CHURCH TIMES

MODERN EAST END CHURCH



This is the new St. Paul's church, Bow Common, E.3, of which the architect is Mr. Robert Maguire. It replaces a church destroyed in the war and will be consecrated by the Bishop of London on April 30



Halifax Photos.

The Bishop of London is seen here dedicating the new St. Paul's Church, Burdett Road.

## Bishop describes three functions of new church

**THE** church that is guaranteed to make them stop and stare was dedicated and reopened on Saturday by the Bishop of London.

It is the rebuilt St. Paul's Church, Bow, which stands at the corner of Burdett Road and St. Paul's Way.

The church is designed in a way that has never quite been seen in East London before.

It has been described as a return to the primitive idea of a church, with the altar in the centre and seats placed on all sides of it—symbolic of The Last Supper.

It is a strictly functional church, with no added ornaments and looks uncommonly bare compared with the others that have been built in East London during post-war years.

### SEATS FOR 200

There are sufficient seats for 200 people, with room for another 200 standing.

It has already aroused a great deal of interest and controversy and is a complete breakaway from the medieval structure of most churches.

The contemporary touch is

added, however, by steel reinforced concrete—and the cost of the entire church was £38,500, which was gathered from war damage payment.

The members of the church have, in addition, raised £1,000 for furnishings.

The church was packed on Saturday for the consecration by the Bishop of London who indirectly dismissed the unusual structure of the church when he said in his sermon: "We come here not to criticise, but to perform a duty."

### THREE FUNCTIONS

He then went on to illustrate the three primary functions of the church in this way: "It is a school, where there are still fields of knowledge open to all of us; it is a place of fellowship, where we can meet as a family; and it is a powerhouse, from which you go out to give as well as come in to receive."

The previous church of St. Paul's was destroyed by enemy action on March 17, 1941.

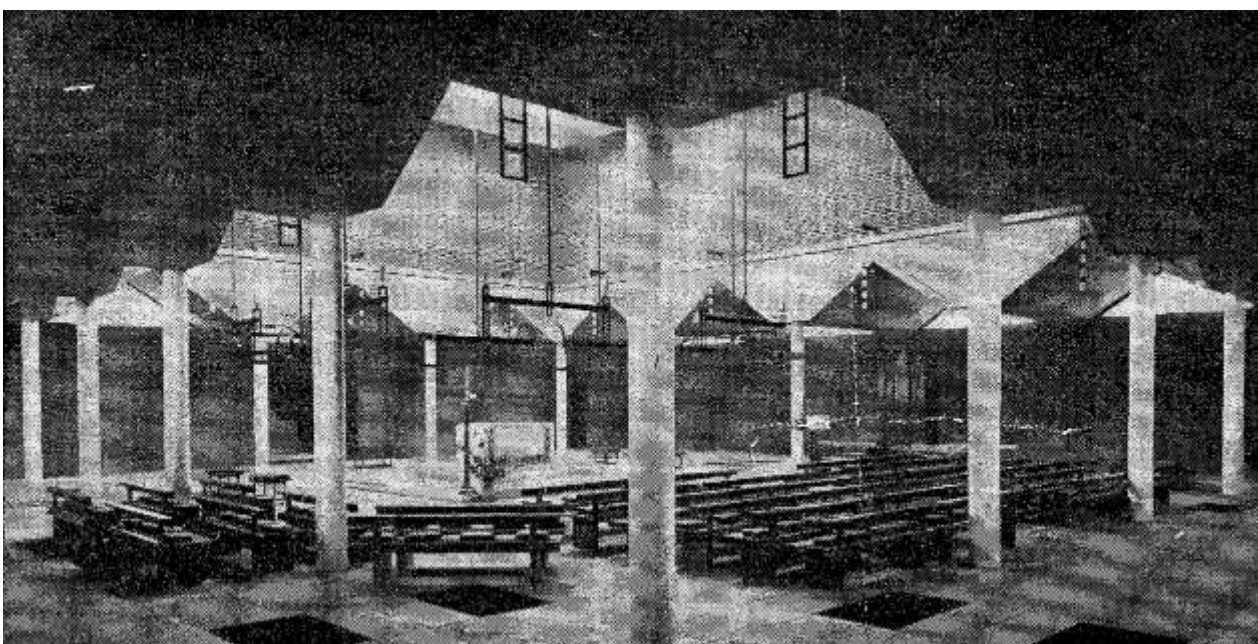
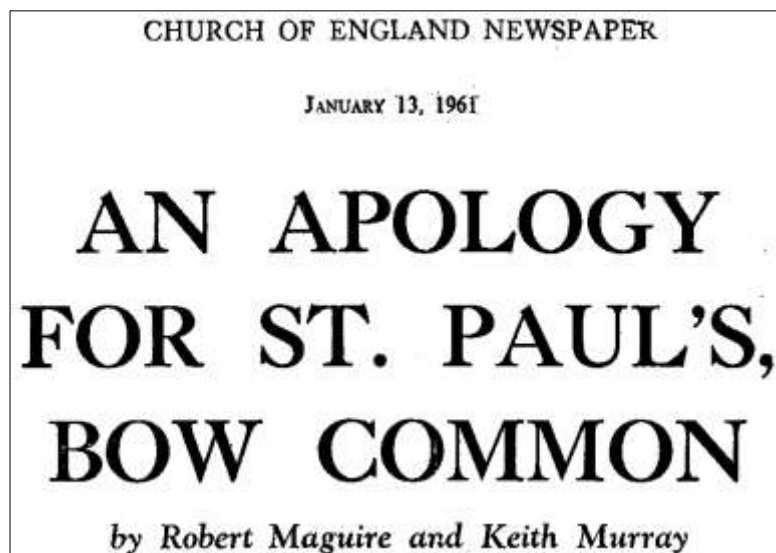
The shell of that building stood on the site for many years afterwards, until it was demolished to make way for its rather controversial successor

## ~ First Reactions to the New Building ~

The first formal but 'unofficial' comment on St. Paul's, Bow Common was not at all encouraging! The Bishop of London who consecrated the building, **Bishop Henry Montgomery Campbell**, is recorded in the press cutting above as having 'indirectly dismissed the unusual structure of the church' in his sermon when he said, "**We come here not to criticise but to perform a duty.**" I'm told that the disapproving look on his face in all the photographs of the event was more his common demeanour than a specifically sour response to the building he was having to dedicate.

I have it on good authority that in the small selection of press clippings which follow the anonymous ascription of the comment, "I hope the inside is not as bad as the outside .... It's worse!" to 'a bishop,' was made, in fact, by Bishop Winnington Ingram as he entered the church for the first time on that night of Dedication! At the major celebrations 50 years later to the day, led by the present Bishop of London, Bishop Richard Chartres, he confirmed that this generally dour outlook was, indeed, something for which his predecessor had a bit of a reputation! Interestingly and purely by chance, Bishop Chartres brought with him the same pastoral staff as had been used on that night of dedication 50 years earlier!

These press clippings which follow (not quite complete) come from the church archive:



THESE quotations give an idea of the variety of opinion about St. Paul's, Bow Common. One of the most interesting is that quoted in the *C.E.N.* of December 2nd 1960, by the architects of St. George's, Stevenage, who have compared it with St. Paul's, Bow Common, and said that St. Paul's is a complete departure from "the accepted form of English church." In this they seem to be supported by many of the general public as the comment by a "passer-by" illustrates. It might be interesting to examine how and when the image arose; as we believe that most of the churches built between the Reformation and the first quarter of the 19th century would equally depart from the accepted form if that is represented by St. George's, Stevenage. Perhaps in this context "accepted" means accepted by the man in the street. Such an appeal to popular sentiment may have been the appropriate decision in a new town like Stevenage. We do not think it would be right in the east end of London.

Bow Common seems to be a departure from the accepted form of English church. The question of how Bow Common came to be built may be interesting. Unlike St. George's, Stevenage, of which the Bishop of London wrote, "its building has strained local resources to the full," Bow Common was built with concern for true economy. It is a church itself a parish and a model for all for less than the cost of a conventional church build-

### The Needs of the Parish

In 1955 when we were asked to design a church for this parish, they were worshipping in a damaged Victorian Gothic building and for various reasons the number of people was small. To develop the participation of the laity in the Eucharistic action it seemed natural under these conditions to move the altar from the east wall towards the people, and then to face them in the Eucharist. This was found to work in the development of the worship of the parish. Apart from the experience of greater participation in the worship, it was seen that

the altar table standing in the space of the church, not like a sideboard against the wall, brought out both its character as a table around which the parish gather, and its character as an altar. It should be emphasised that these things were done not for theoretical reasons, trying to return to some supposedly ideal period of the past, but because of the felt needs of the parish.

In designing the church the basis of the design was an attempt to understand the needs of the parish. To do this we had to comprehend the present needs of the parish and the future developments which the church will have to accommodate; to see them in the light of our understanding of the tradition of the Church, not only the tradition of that branch called the Church of England, but also the trunk and roots of the tradition in patristic and apostolic times. To gain this understanding and to create a relationship between the vicar, P.C.C. and ourselves, we prepared a list of 66 questions. The answers to these and the understanding which arose through discussing them were developed into a "programme" covering 6 sheets of foolscap, this was submitted to the diocesan authorities and formed the basis of sketch designs.

The "programme" included factual matter—"The church to be built to contain a maximum of 500 seats; permanent seating for 250-300 for normal use," and ideas indicating the sort of building needed: "These permanent seats should be carefully related to the altar in such a way that the congregation feels itself a unity. . ." These ideas were expressed in terms which would not cramp the design, but provide us with the understanding needed and a standard by which the design could be considered.

The last paragraph of the programme read, "The church should be allowed to evolve naturally from these requirements and to dictate its own plan form. On the other hand, its character, both externally and internally, must immediately suggest a church. . ."

Pugin wrote of Gothic, "It is considered suitable for some purposes, melancholy, and therefore fit for religious buildings, a style that an architect of the day should be acquainted

*"It's not the sort of church I like. In the week, I know my job inside out and on Sundays I like some mystery."*—a High Anglican businessman.



*"That thing (the altar) looks like the thing Abraham sacrificed Isaac on."*—a visitor.



*"The best Eucharistic Room I have seen."*—R. C. Professor of Moral Theology.



*"It is not to be expected that so bold a plunge into what somebody has called 'spiritual nudism' will command universal approval. Some people will hate it."*—*Church Times*.



*"The plain but relaxed statement of function; the honest but unassertive revelation of materials and structure; the varied but uncontrived lighting, all combine to give a religious building with a hundred times as much character — religious character at that — as some church where the architect has knocked himself out to produce a sacred edifice."*—Reyner Banham in *The New Statesman*.

*"It (St. George's, Stevenage) is meant to be a church which people would recognise, that they would see in shape and form as a church. This means we have taken advantage of the traditional Gothic inspiration—slender columns and wide span arches—but interpreted them with modern methods. It does not resemble Bow Common because Bow Common is a complete departure from the accepted form of English church, but equally forcefully it (St. George's) isn't a simple reproduction of a traditional style."—Lord Mottistone and Mr. Paul Paget, the architects of St. George's, Stevenage, in the C.E.N., December 2, 1960.*

◆ ◆ ◆  
*"I like a church to look like a proper church . . . with the altar stuck out in front there it just don't look like a proper church, now does it? . . . No, I ain't never been to a service."—an interviewed passer-by.*

◆ ◆ ◆  
*"It's lovely for processions . . . I like processing, I could have a procession every Sunday."—a parishioner.*

◆ ◆ ◆  
*"As a result, St. Paul's can serve the needs of the Church without ceasing to be a modern building. Modern, that is, not in terms of current decorative clichés, structural acrobatics or fashionable formalisms but modern in the sense of the hard core of moral conviction that holds together any number of formal and structural concepts on the basis of what Lethaby called 'nearness to need'."—editorial comment in The Architectural Review, December, 1960.*

◆ ◆ ◆  
*"I hope the inside is not as bad as the outside . . . It's worse!"—a Bishop.*

## Some Early Photos of the New Church

**The Church School** had been founded in 1860, two years after the first St. Paul's, Bow Common was built. The churches of St. Paul's and St. Luke's each had their own church school but after the War and post-War reorganisation, just St. Paul's School continued, now with the name, 'St. Paul with St. Luke.' Maguire and Murray built a new school (their first school) near the church in Leopold Street in 1972. Up to then the school remained at its original site near to St. Luke's Church on the other side of Burdett Rd. In 1960 one of the first major services after the dedication was to give thanks for the **School centenary** and these three photographs witness to that occasion. It is interesting to see the church as it was at first, with no mosaics as yet, no canopy (ciborium) over the altar & the organ not yet installed up on the west wall of the church but with a temporary small organ/harmonium which can be seen in the background. Fr Kirkby and Fr. John Rowe preside.





This and the following are two of the very few early views that remain of the inside of the church.



There are no mosaics yet nor has the steel and marble canopy 'ciborium' been installed over the altar, both very much part of the original design but not yet in place.

Charles Lutyens did not start work on the mosaics until 1963 and that places these views as taken at some time between 1960 and 1963.

Without the ciborium in place there is an extraordinary sense of the huge open volume of the church. The small wheat sheaf against a pillar is a clue that this may have been taken at Harvest-tide in 1960.

**In 1965 English Heritage took the 4 views below of the still new church:**







In correspondence with me in 2009, Bob Maguire wrote:

*27 'We organised conferences of clergy and architects, and in early 1959 Peter Vowles, Vicar of Perry Beeches, Birmingham, asked me to be me architect for his new church after attending one of them. A few weeks later Sir Arthur Norrington, President of Trinity College, Oxford, wrote to me with an invitation to design a large scheme of new rooms (two quadrangles) within the College's grounds. It was obvious that I could no longer do the job at the Architectural Press, but more than that, I needed help with the management of what had become an architectural practice.*

*Keith was working on the design for the mosaics (for St. Paul's, Bow Common) and also starting to carve a large figure of Christ in Majesty for the east wall at St Katherine's, as well of course as doing his job as MD of Watts & Co. I raised the question as to whether, as he had management skills and as we had such a common understanding of the general task we were committed to, he thought a partnership might work.*

*It was a difficult decision for us both. He would have to give up a fairly well-paid and secure job and probably pass the mosaic work over to someone else (it turned out that he was already in doubt as to whether he could satisfactorily achieve the Christ figure), in order to do a job which was as yet a complete unknown. I would be taking a gamble in taking on a partner who had no idea how to design a building, let alone construct it, and had no experience of the building world or the awful intricacies of building contracts.*

*But we jumped in. Just at that moment the Murrays left the Regents Square studio house having bought a house in Islington; Keith took over the living quarters and we moved into the studio as our office. **In October 1959 we became Robert Maguire & Keith Murray.** I negotiated my departure from under the aegis of Carden and Godfrey. I felt we needed to give the new practice a firm identity in the form of an oeuvre. St Paul's was nearing completion and Perry Beeches had been approved by the parish; discussions were under way with Trinity College. It seemed a good idea to bring all the work under the name of the new practice. That is why, in publications, St Paul's is correctly credited to Robert Maguire up to 1959 (e.g. in *Liturgy and Architecture*, the *Architectural Review* and reviews by Ian Nairn) with or without the Carden & Godfrey attachment and reference to Keith Fendall as consulting designer, and after 1959 it appears with the RM & KM accreditation.*

*The way in which Keith and I worked together always seemed a mystery to our friends outside the practice. While it was true that Keith handled the administrative, financial and personnel side of things, and the actual design of all our buildings originated on my own drawing-board, it was far from that simple. He and I had totally similar appreciations of how architectural space 'works', although I was conscious that the image in his mind's eye was always more 'traditional' or perhaps 'historical' than that in mine.*

*This however didn't matter, because as I gave architectural form to a building he accepted with enthusiasm its more radical appearance. So we were able to discuss design strategy and the 'feel' of what a project seemed to need, with complete understanding, and in fact we developed a 'shorthand' way of talking about architectural concepts which was rapid and incomprehensible to others, even those near to us in the office. Also, he was the most incisive critic; he could see immediately where a design wasn't going to work. Besides all this, he developed a fine knowledge of building contract law and of procedures on building sites.'*

The mosaics of the Heavenly Host were an integral part of the design of the church and were to have been executed by Keith Murray but were then handed on to Charles Lutyens. Over a period of five years he created this extraordinary work using War reparation funds for stained glass in the old church and there is more about Lutyens and his work later.

The spandrels above each of the columns remained blank, therefore, for a while, and from 1963 single-handedly he created what is probably Britain's largest contemporary mosaic executed by one person. Photographs follow which are from this period and any of the interior show the mosaics in the process of being created. Charles Lutyens' scaffolding can be seen in this view.



With the new church now consecrated and in use, and everything was not yet in place with funds still needing to be raised. These extracts of Minutes of PCC meetings hint at this need in the year following:

### 15 March 1961

*'Moved by Miss McKenzie, seconded by Mrs. Edwards, that Mrs. Payne's bequest of £417 be sold and the money spent on **furnishings for a chapel**. Carried.*

*Moved by Miss McKenzie, seconded by Mrs. Edwards, that Miss Jeffrey's original bequest be sold and the money to go towards **furnishings for the high altar**. Carried.*

#### Organ

*Father Kirkby reported that Sheffield Cathedral was considering buying the **old organ** for £2,500.*

#### Church Furnishings

*The **crucifix** for the south wall and a **hymn board** were now ready to be put up and the **processional cross** will be ready for Easter.*

***Vicarage** The Diocesan authorities have indicated that they are anxious to have **work on the new vicarage** started, since Robeson Street is scheduled for demolition within the year.'*

### 5 April 1961 Annual Meeting

***'New Vicarage: To be started this year.** Plans were being made and the Archdeacon had approved them in principle.*

#### Consecration Anniversary

*Agreed that we should have the evening service around 4 p.m. and have a tea party afterwards.'*

In the section which follows is a fairly comprehensive collection of responses and reactions in the architectural world to the new building, from 1963 - 1998.

## How the architectural world responded to St. Paul's, Bow Common in the decades that followed its construction.

### 1963: G. Cope

<sup>8</sup> *'The most striking new Anglican church is London, Bow Common, St. Paul (Maguire, 1960) where no special choir accommodation has been provided – the singers occupy one section of the nave seating which is arranged in wedged blocks around three sides of a square sanctuary - itself very much' in the midst of a rectangular building. This is definitely a room for the eucharistic gathering and the font is symbolically well placed near the entrance: there is no fixed pulpit or lectern. This church, based on a radical analytical approach to the liturgical requirements constructed with an uncompromising use of common materials, is undoubtedly a landmark in the English scene.'*

### 1964: Ian Nairn

<sup>9</sup> *'The only modern building in the London Transport area to reflect any real credit on the Church of England. What a judgement! A compact, tough-minded cube of purple bricks, top-lit, in a tough-minded area. Passionate and original to the cross on the dome but a truly religious originality, not an applied or architectural one. In terms of sincerity, Robert Maguire is a twentieth-century Butterfield and this is our All Saints Margaret Street. The plan is based on a central altar. Inside, columns and light fittings decorously frame what for once really is a holy place - the light fittings off-centre inside the columns, which is tremendously effective. The passages around have saw-toothed roofs which let in light unevenly like a broken prayer. The porch carries vibrant lettering, not conforming to any current cliché, which says: 'Truly this is none other but the house of God. This is the gate of Heaven.' Indeed it is and what else is there to say '!'*

### 1964: G.E. Kidder-Smith:

<sup>10</sup> [Construction – reinforced concrete inner frame carrying brick tower walls: load-bearing brick outer walls; steel-framed roof over centre, folded concrete roof over sides.

Finish and colours – purple-grey brick outside and in; white concrete finish; reddish stone and white flint brick floor laid in processional pattern; natural wood pews with red cushions. 200 moveable seats at present, expandable to 500 as neighbourhood grows. Protestant]

<sup>10</sup> *'Bow Common represents the Church of England's first substantial essay into post-war church building, and, further, its first positive statement of the new Liturgical Movement. It must be judged, therefore, as a pioneer, and a brave and somewhat experimental one at that. In a nondescript neighbourhood that is destined for redevelopment into eleven-storey apartment buildings, the church stands out with an angular forcefulness which, though a mite awkward in the prominent 'lantern', promises a welcoming retreat inside. The plan is squarish with low aisles around all four sides and a lofty inner nave and sanctuary. The octagonal entry terminates one end of the diagonal and the sacristy and offices, etc. the other.*

*Only the font and the altar are permanently fixed. Maguire particularly wanted an intimate relation between altar, priest and congregation; he therefore placed the altar well forward and surrounded it on three sides by pews. There is, thus, a respectful grouping about the sanctuary, and a focus on it intensified by the down-pouring of light from the great lantern directly above. There is also, however, a certain amorphous and temporary quality along the outer edges of the interior space which is particularly unsatisfactory behind the altar. The wall here, with small chapel centred behind, serves scarcely more than a service and circulation area that as background detracts from the holiness of the sanctuary.*

*Moreover, the visibility of the small triangles of clear glass (in the folded roof planes) behind the altar does not help-clear glass behind an altar rarely does. Another disturbing detail can be seen in the guillotine appearance of the wrought iron corona lucis, defining the sanctuary. In some respects, thus, the church is weak. However, in basic thinking, particularly as regards the plan and the altar's relation to the congregation, Bow Common can exert a powerful and salutary influence on British religious architecture. A church school and eventually a new vicarage will be added adjacent to it.'*

### **1965: Maguire and Murray**

<sup>11</sup> *'A church is a place for the assembly of the people of God. It is a holy place, consecrated, set apart for this purpose.'* While these two linked ideas were the basis of the design, it was developed to fulfil the special needs of the place and a particular Christian community. For instance, while the church had to be able to seat 500 people its normal congregation would be much smaller. The central space within the colonnade and the continuous aisles around it are so arranged that a small congregation within the columns will not feel lost, since the columns, white and brightly lit on their inner faces, produce a strong feeling of enclosure. On the other hand, these columns do not cut off people in the lower aisles, since the form of the aisle roofs projects the space towards the centre.

*The church may be seen as a pattern of relationships, which are significant because of their function in the context of an actual liturgy; a liturgy seen as a movement towards the place of the altar and communion, a movement towards the light. In this church the movement is inwards through the dark porch, past the font, through the procession to the place of the Ministry of the Word – synaxis - into the light of the sanctuary.'* In this the colonnade, and hanging corona of lights around the sanctuary, and the ciborium define the spaces without preventing free movement between them.

*The church is built out of cheap flint brick and fair-faced concrete, exposed rolled steel sections and ordinary concrete paving slabs like the pavement of the street outside; each thing carefully done, an affirmation of the intrinsic value of ordinary industrial materials and good work. Contrasted with these materials will be mosaics of angels in the panels above the columns.'*

### **July 1965: Nicholas Taylor:**

<sup>12</sup> *'The Church of St Paul, Bow Common, built in the eastern part of Stepney in 1958-60 to the design of Robert Maguire and Keith Murray, has recently been described with justice as 'the only modern building in the London Transport area to reflect any real credit on the Church of England'. The Established Church has spent over £20 million on new church buildings in England since 1945. The vast majority of these, designed by a strange breed of 'ecclesiastical architects', have been watered down versions of the traditional Gothic pattern or, more recently, attempts at the spectacular art-modern, à la Coventry Cathedral. This is partly the result of the general quiescence that lay upon English architecture between 1905 and 1935, at the time when modern architecture was reaching maturity on the Continent. Yet some of the most important roots of this new architecture lay in the church architecture of the English Gothic Revival, in the work of Butterfield, Street, Norman Shaw and William Morris. The pioneer churches of the Oxford Movement in the East End - St Columba's, Haggerston; St Chad's, Hoxton; St Peter's, London Docks - were strong, 'realistic' buildings of hard red brick with clearly defined liturgical plans for the circumstances of the 1860's. St. Paul's Bow Common, is an attempt to provide their equivalent for the changed conditions of the 1960's.*

*It stands on the corner of Burdett Road and St Paul's Way, replacing a blitzed Gothic Revival church (1856, architect Rhode Hawkins). The immediate surroundings are bleak: prefabs, decayed terrace houses, land cleared for new housing - and the vigorous outline of the railway viaduct which slices through that part of the East End. The first sight of the church is of a solid, rather stumpy mass of dark purplish brick (the mass is designed to contrast with tall flats which are shortly to be erected on the cleared site next door). Three elements are clearly apparent at close quarters: the continuous 12-ft. high blank wall surrounding the church at ground level, topped by the saw-toothed 'folded slab' roofs of the aisles; the high box-like enclosure of the main space for the congregation, with the two bells and their machinery roughly clamped onto it; and the central pyramidal lantern lighting the sanctuary, steel-framed and clad in ribbed aluminium sheet.*

*On the south side the bounding wall is prolonged to encircle an electricity sub-station, the sacristy and the meeting room, which has a massive beamed roof. The geometry of these parts is superbly calculated and the brick surfaces are of a quality rarely found in England. To the east a courtyard has recently been formed with the erection of the vicarage. The church has an astonishing immensity when seen from this side, with the diminutive eastern chapel playing up the volume of the main rectangle. The vicarage itself is an attractive yellow-brown brick villa, with a large glazed upper room rather like that of a signal box (perhaps an appropriate image for a vicar).'*

**1966: Ian Nairn:**

<sup>13</sup> *'One worthwhile new church in a city region of ten millions, at a time when France and Germany have dozens. Make what you like of the implications. Anyway, here it is, burningly honest but not aggressive on a run-down steet corner (Budett Rd. and St. Paul's Way) in Stepney. It is completely fresh, the perennial force seen again for the first time. Purple brick, a top-lit cube on a long podium, with a porch almost detached with quivering letters on it: This is the Gate of Heaven. And it is.*

*Not one thing has come out of slickness or reaction oi a wish to be original. Hence it is tuly original, like All Saints, Margaret Steet, a centuy before. Often locked, but it is worth digging out the keys, for it was built from the inside out, around a central altar. This is under the cube. Around it lights dance on a square iron frame, better than all the copies of parclose screens. Demure, yet full of fun, reverent, yet completely light-hearted: the place seems to heal you.'*

**1969: Michael Webb:**

<sup>14</sup> *'One of the main canons of good architecture is fitness for purpose. Purposes are constantly being redefined, but it is usually possible to judge a secular building objectively. With churches it is not so easy, partly because the activities they enshrine are concerned more with spiritual than material ends & partly because of dogmatic distinctions hallowed by centuries of tradition. Between Calvinist austerity & Roman Catholic theatricality lie a wealth of subtle gradations affecting plan, structure, lighting & furnishing,*

*Attempts to build non-denominational churches have made little headway, despite all the talk of Christian unity. What progress has been made has come in the form of separate initiatives directed towards similar ends. On the Continent, the Liturgical Movement has inspired a quantity of churches that dissolve the barriers - physical and psychological - between clergy and laity, and speak to the 20th century in the language of the living. Britain remained, even 10 years ago, isolated from this movement, but since then there has been a gradual stirring.*

*The most outspoken apostle of change in Britain is an Anglican, Peter Hammond, whose books 'Liturgy and Architecture' and 'Towards a New Church Architecture' have exerted considerable influence. Hammond's views are worth quoting at length, for they represent the impatience and idealism of a whole new generation in the Anglican Church. 'The majority of our post-war churches are anachronistic - whether they are built in a contemporary idiom or not - because their layout embodies a conception of the Church and its worship which is essentially medieval. The fact that many of them exploit the possibilities of new structural methods and materials does not make them modern churches. Everywhere today one finds Christians 'attempting to worship in buildings that imply beliefs they do not hold and patterns of worship they do not practice.*

*A church is essentially a place for doing, for corporate action in which all are participants and each has his appropriate function to perform; it is not a sort of jewelled cave in which the solitary individual may find some kind of worship experience, and where his emotions may be kindled by the contemplation of a remote spectacle.' Jewelled caves and medieval plans are still being designed, and a majority of the clergy probably feel more at home in them than they would in the functional interiors preferred by Hammond. But nowhere does he propound doctrines of the sort that made the gothic style almost obligatory for 19<sup>th</sup>-century churches.*

*In fact, he is chiefly concerned with planning and with a logical relationship of the different elements. He suggests that, just as the stage is the starting point for a new conception of theatrical space, so should the sanctuary be for the church. Symbols should be relevant and well thought out, not decorative additions. The altar stands both for sacrifice and for the table used at the Last Supper; its form should express this, and it should be set well forward so that the priest or minister can celebrate communion while facing the congregation. Choir stalls interposed between nave and sanctuary (as in Coventry Cathedral) create a barrier to corporate worship. These are fundamental precepts that need not inhibit the architects' creativity, but do establish certain priorities. Churches are, above all, functional buildings, not excuses for artistic self-indulgence or tasteful exercises in revivalism.'*

<sup>14</sup> *'The architects whose beliefs accord most closely with those of Hammond are Robert Maguire and Keith Murray. The fact that they have so far designed only Protestant churches merely reflects the greater conservatism of the Roman hierarchy in this country; Robert Maguire is himself a Catholic, and their work has equal relevance to all denominations.'*

### **St Paul's. London E.3**

*Their first job together was St Paul's, Bow Common - an austere, inwards-looking church in a tough neighbourhood. Construction is of loadbearing purple bricks, with columns defining wide aisles and supporting both the saw-tooth reinforced-concrete roof and the brick tower above. Church and hall are linked by a continuous wall, and partly enclose the garden of the priest's house on the far side of the site. An octagonal porch projects out to the north-west.*

*The interior is similarly down-to-earth. The altar is set well forward on an island sanctuary, and its centrality is emphasised by an iron baldacchino. Pews seating 200 are grouped round three sides of the sanctuary, with space for larger congregations in the aisles. The font is placed just inside the porch on the axis of the north and west aisles.*

*As a breakthrough in church architecture, Bow Common is a remarkable achievement. But it has several faults. The asymmetrical tower and lantern are subject to optical distortion. The interior lacks coherence: there is an excess of decoration (including mosaics which were not installed when the photograph was taken), and insufficient alignment - always a risk with centralised plans.'*

### **1970: Nigel Melhuish:**

<sup>15</sup> *'St. Pauls, Bow Common in still the best known modern church in England. For some years it was the only one worth talking about. It was discussed in Sunday papers, on TV, in countless lectures on liturgical reform, and even got a review in the New Statesman with Peter Hammond's 'Liturgy and Architecture'. Between them, Hammond's book and Bow Common had a decisive influence on the renewal of church architecture during the sixties and both have suffered the penalty of becoming respectable. In the ecclesiastical world (as in all societies with poor systems of internal communication) creative innovations tend either to be ignored, or tuned into a superficial orthodoxy. In due course everyone feels stifled, and any further development has to appear as a 'breakthrough' - yet another radical departure from the recent past.*

*Ten years after Bow Common, church architecture is again in the throes of reappraisal. A neutral observer of the English scene - Gunter Rambold, editor of the Austrian journal Christliche Kunstblatte - wrote in February 1970: 'The churches by Maguire and Murray are the best English churches of the 'sixties. But although they are 'good architecture' they presuppose a traditional building programme. Today church building of the old style is being questioned fundamentally by sociologists and pastoral theologians.*

*... The growth of Christian unity is creating a demand for churches shared by different denominations; other factors - notably shortage of money and clergymen - are leading to the creation of social structures alongside the parishes and Free Church congregations. By and large the church building programmes of the last few years have been geared to denominational and parochial systems that are likely to be changed beyond all recognition by the end of the century. In the late 'fifties problems of this sort were vaguely recognised, but the main issues in church building were architectural and theological. In this country church architecture was still under the spell of historicism, and theologians were trying to get rid of liturgical concepts inherited from the nineteenth century. The meeting of liturgy and modern architecture may have been a limited encounter, but it involved considerable mental adjustments on both sides. In the process it has enlarged our understanding of the human environment, and the best churches of the 'sixties embody ideas which are likely to become increasingly relevant in secular architecture as well as the small world of church building.'*

<sup>15</sup> *'... the problem of church design is not only to provide appropriate places for the various rites considered separately but also to establish meaningful relationships. In an abstract way the connections between baptism and communion etc. are a matter for theologians, but the spatial expression of these relationships is the architect's job and depends on the given situation.'*

<sup>15</sup> *'Most of the churches by Maguire and Murray look straightforward enough, but the appearance of simplicity is deceptive. Each one is a complex three-dimensional exercise based on sensitive understanding of the various social events which make up the liturgy. Although the buildings are all different, they have certain points in common. In each case there is one main volume, which is articulated to provide distinct but clearly related 'places'. The lighting is all at high level, and the quality of the interior depends on the varying intensities of reflected light on the walls, floors and ceilings. For this reason there are no low level windows and no views of the world outside.*

*These churches are all open-plan buildings, providing for several kinds of activity within the same volume. In this respect they differ from many modern churches – especially on the Continent – where the problem posed by the differing requirements of mass, baptism, private prayer etc., has been overcome by providing separate compartments for each. This sort of solution makes the architect's task easier, but only at the cost of an impoverished symbolism.'*

### **1973: Nigel Melhuish:**

<sup>16</sup> *'Church architecture was not a subject which interested modern architects in the 1920s and 30s. Anything in the nature of civic or religious ritual was regarded as one of the dustier relics of the past – a part of the disposable rubbish which formed so much of our cultural inheritance. In the Wellsian epoch the new movements in art and architecture were not concerned with the traditional centres of public ceremonial - churches, palaces and town halls - but with the factory often seen as a new temple of the human spirit. A dismissive attitude towards the past remained for a long time in the background of modern architectural theory and after the war architects and planners sometimes found it difficult to conceal their disappointment that the German bombers had not done their work more thoroughly.*

*Much of the pre-war ideology now seem as remote and curious as the Gothic Revival seemed to Kenneth Clark in 1928. The architectural radicalism of today, looking to sociology rather than the natural sciences, regards the inherited environment as something to be handled with care. Sanity is seen to be largely dependent on the retention of the familiar; and to destroy the well-known streets and landmarks is to disrupt the complex network of relationships which make an established way of life. In this context the notion of 'ritual' has acquired a new significance as an expression of meaning and human order - architecture is perhaps not so much an 'extension of human biology' (Neutra's phrase) as an extension of ritual.*

*During the inter-war period the prevailing Christian theology was mystical and pietistic and church architects were apt to think of their buildings primarily as places for solitary encounters with the *mysterium tremendum*. The main interest was not the accommodation of church ceremonial - seen as a set of hallowed clerical routines – but the creation of 'atmosphere'. Liturgy, however, is a word which refers to activities having a social rather than a private significance. The implications of the liturgical movement began to be studied by architects such as Rudolf Schwarz during the 1920s, and after the war the communal nature of the liturgy became the basic assumption of most German church building.*

*With a few outstanding exceptions, church architecture in Britain was unaffected by theological development until the work of continental architects began to be published here in the late 1950s. At that time Coventry Cathedral was still the dominant architectural influence & the central problem of modern church-building was apt to be seen as a matter of 'style' - of finding suitable new clothes for the unchanging ceremonies of the Faith.*

*Signs of a new direction first came from the Anglicans. Peter Hammond's 'Liturgy and Architecture', published in 1960 provided a well-written account of the theological background to Continental church-building, together with a damaging review of the post-war achievements of the Establishment. In the same year Robert Maguire and Keith Murray completed the church of St. Paul, Bow Common, often described as the first really modern church in England.*

*For some years Bow Common was the only church which could hope to find a place in anthologies of new British architecture. It was radical building, both in its rejection of stylistic mannerisms and in its serious understanding of liturgy as a source of Christian meaning.'*



<sup>16</sup> *'The main volume of the church is a plain brick cube surrounded by a low 'folded slab' roof over the rear parts of the congregational area. The sealing is arranged on three sides of the sanctuary, and the central space is brightly lit from a high lantern. To complement the strong light in the sanctuary, there is a ring of soft light from the low level windows above the walls surrounding the congregation.'*

*Within the social and theoretical framework of church-building during the last decade the main features of this arrangement have a certain logical inevitability and Bow Common was a decisive influence on the development of church architecture during the 1960s.'*

### **1990: Philip Gibbons:**

<sup>18</sup> *"A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house."*

*St Paul's is a building that falls into the category of late prophet. At the time of its completion in 1960, Peter Hammond wrote of it, "A church of outstanding promise, which may well prove to be something of a landmark in the recreation of a living tradition of church architecture in this country." The following years have not seen the full potential of St Paul's realised and the failure lies in the lack of relationship between building and changing circumstance. Local East End families moved out as a massive wave of immigrants took their place. The parish population decreased and the expected urban renewal became inner city poverty and conflict. St Paul's seemed destined for gentle obscurity. But if the role of a prophet includes an ability to raise questions about old ideas and challenge the status quo, then Bow Common has a voice that still deserves to be heard!*

*In the '50s and '60s, the liturgical movement gave an impetus to modern church architecture which involved "rethinking" church space to express a developed theological understanding of the structures of worship. Bow Common realised this through an exacting simplicity of design and an understanding of human scale. Descriptions of the actual design and construction of the church may be found in several books and articles.'*

<sup>18</sup> *'Recently St Paul's was given grade 2\* listing as a place of more than special interest. The Church Times pointed out, "It was the first church building designed by Maguire and Murray and established their reputation as major ecclesiastical architects. " The vicar, the Revd Gresham Kirkby, showed great determination and had clear ideas of what he wanted. English Heritage was to describe it as "an important post-war church development of austere design in a tough neighbourhood. "*

*Many of the concerns that engaged architect and parish have now become part of the brief for contemporary church building. The theology of the liturgy determines the foci not only in terms of altar, but also ambo, president's seat and baptistery. Adaptability rather than fixity is a key concept. In this Bow Common shows us the result of a partnership between a priest who saw the liturgy developing and designers who were able to carry out and understand the vision of the parish.*

*Because the parish of St. Paul decreased in numbers the building ceased to be much noticed, yet it is my contention that as it comes up to celebrating the 30th anniversary of its dedication it could have a revitalised function as a place of pilgrimage for all who are interested in church building and worship. "Christians do not succumb to the grace of faith first and then sort out what their options for worship might be. Augustine worshipped with the faithful for many years before he succumbed to the grace of faith. As he himself tells us, the sound of the Christians singing and the thunder of their amens rolling through the basilicas in which they worshipped moved him further toward faith than did his own sharp edged arguments against the Manichees".*

*We may also recall the envoys of the Rus, who in their search for true religion participated in the liturgy at Justinian's church of Hagia Sophia and were converted through this worship describing it as "Heaven on Earth". St. Paul's may yet prove to be such a meeting place. Oases are invaluable in the economy of the desert. In the shifting sands of London, with the moving landmarks of culture and morality a Christian community at worship, in a building constructed for its use is a powerful symbol. It may offer hope for the faithful, encouragement for the pilgrim and a welcome to those who, like Augustine and so many after him, come in search of truth.'*

### **1993: Robert Maguire: A Tribute to the Vicar of St. Paul's**

<sup>18</sup> *'No assessment of St Paul's would be complete without mention of Fr. Gresham Kirkby, Vicar of St Paul's with St Luke's from the early 1950s, it was he who led a committed, indigenous East End congregation in liturgical reform of the kind we all now take for granted. Using the freedom granted by a condemned Victorian parish hall - no Diocesan Advisory Committees, no Faculties (though he would surely say "if they'd said I had to ask permission, I would have ignored it," - he and his people arranged and re-arranged the furniture until they had the relationships right.*

*I still find it incredible that Gresham Kirkby was prepared to fight for a revolutionary design by an unknown architect, getting it past a diocesan establishment which included - on the DAC - such gothicist and classicist stalwarts as W H Godfrey and A E Richardson. The same courage, born out of profound personal piety has carried him through the subsequent, often sad, history of his parish in which he saw demographic planners carry off his beloved East Enders to New Towns, demolish their "slum" houses, and replace them with a heterogeneous and largely unchurched community in multi-storey flats.*

*During this time he commissioned an equally revolutionary and contentious primary school (Lady Plowden eventually declared it the only school to fulfil the recommendations of the Plowden Report and Sir Roger Waters, then Chief Architect Planner of the GUI, said "I am amazed that such a thing can also be architecture, but it is!") and has demonstrated how one of the toughest Educational Priority Areas in London can share territory with the Kingdom of God.*

*He retires this coming year. His story is one to encourage, though perhaps not to comfort, every clergyman about to succumb to faint heart in the face of uncomprehending authority.'*

### **1997: RIBA exhibition Heinz Gallery, Kenneth Powell:**

<sup>21</sup> *'This is the Gate of Heaven" reads the inscription above the entrance to St Paul's, Bow Common, in the East End of London. It is a gate, unfortunately, through which all too few of the inhabitants of the surrounding blocks of council flats have passed since the church was opened in 1960 as a replacement for a Victorian church destroyed by German "bombs. The product of post-war optimism, St Paul's now faces a struggle to survive. It is a prime example of that threatened species, the modern church.*

*The old St Paul's - stone-built Victorian Gothic with a spire - fitted the popular image of a church. The new St Paul's (designed by Robert Maguire and Keith Murray) is externally austere, even fortress-like, with no obvious traditional symbolism. You need to go inside to understand why it is rated as one of the best post-war buildings in Britain. The interior, unchanged in nearly 40 years, is simple and majestic, with the sanctuary at the centre. Instead of Victorian clutter, there are just the bare essentials of worship - altar, font and benches beautifully made.*

*Father Duncan Ross, who came to the parish three years ago, loves the building, but is acutely aware of its failings. After a long period of decline, congregations are growing, but it doesn't help that the underfloor heating failed some years ago. A battery of oil heaters makes little impact on the winter chill.*

*St Paul's was listed II\* (starred - and therefore "outstanding") in 1988. It is one of only eight listed 'post-war churches in England, but another 53 have been recommended to the Department of National Heritage for listing by English Heritage.*

*Elain Harwood of EH, the inspector in charge of post-war listing, believes that it is important for the best work of the Fifties and Sixties to be protected. "These churches are vulnerable because of falling congregations and the fact that they're not appreciated" she says. "Most people don't regard them as part of the heritage - we need to reassess them, before it's too late." Harwood concedes that some modern churches were not built to last.'*

**1998: Allan Doig:**

<sup>23</sup> *'The building which is the locus classicus of centralised church planning in England must be St Paul's. Bow Common. Designed by Robert Maguire and Keith Murray, its foundation stone was laid in December 1958 and it was consecrated in the spring of 1960. Peter Hammond analysed it succinctly in his book 'Liturgy and Architecture', immediately prior to its consecration, as follows:*

*'The plan of the church is extremely simple: a rectangle almost as broad as it is long. The altar, with its ciborium, is placed beneath a large glazed lantern which provides the main source of illumination. The sanctuary is further defined by special paving, as is the processional way which surrounds the central space on all sides beyond the colonnade. The congregation will enter the church through the octagonal porch in the north-west corner, passing through the baptistery. There is also a processional west door. Behind the high altar, on the main axis of the church, there is a small chapel for the reserved sacrament. There is a Lady Chapel opening off the processional way to the north of the sanctuary and the organ is on the west wall.*

*There will be no fixed seating in the church and the position of the pulpit is to be decided in the light of experience. This is a church of far greater importance than its unpretentious character might suggest. It is a true domus ecclesiae, planned from the altar outwards. It may well prove to be something of a landmark in the recreation of a living tradition of church architecture in this country.'*

*The church lived up to this prophecy, and in recognition of this was listed Grade II\*, and in 1990 it became the first post-war building to be offered a repair grant by English Heritage.'*

**In 2002, Maguire made this comment:**

<sup>26</sup> *'Since we live in a time of accelerating change, one of the problems we have is that the last fifty years has seen more change in the design and layout of parish churches than is at first apparent to the eye. This is because although the vast majority of them look modern - in the sense of some variation of Modern Movement style (or aberration of it) - the spatial concepts involved have shifted according to changing ideas about the nature of worship, of the nature of the Church as a body, of its relationship with the unchurched world outside, and also according to the differing degrees of understanding of those matters by their architects, and lastly (and sadly) of the differing degrees of understanding of what the Modern Movement in architecture - the milieu in which they thought they were working - was about.*

*St Paul, Bow Common was my first church and indeed my first building, on which I collaborated with Keith Murray, who then became my partner. It was designed in 1956, took a little time to be accepted by various authorities, and was finished and consecrated in 1960. That puts it at the beginning of the major changes. But it really is necessary to put St Paul's into the context of the changing scene both before and after, otherwise I will only be perpetuating certain historical myths. So first let me provide a very rapid and probably rather oversimplified skip through the chronology, with some typical examples.*

*Then second - again, all too hasty - let us consider what we were about when we designed St Paul's. I will just add that of course my ideas too have changed since then - it was more than half my lifetime ago - but some things have remained constant.'*

**He also made this comment about context in 1995:**

<sup>19</sup> *'You may be wondering why the churches (which I have built) are so different from each other, or why there is not a more even developmental path running through them. The answer to that is partly that the congregations who were the clients were really very different; the East Enders at Bow Common were very different from the urbanized country-people at Crewe; there were of course different budgets, the places were very varied in character, and, most important of all, there were nuances of churchmanship even though all these early churches were Anglican.'*

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