

ENGLISH HERITAGE REVIEW OF DIOCESAN CHURCHES 2005 (EXTRACT)

St John the Baptist, Brighton

2 Bristol Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 1AP



HISTORIC IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH

ARCHITECT (S) & DATE (S): 1835 by William Hallett, enlarged 1875 by G R Blount and interior remodelled 1888 by Samuel Joseph Nicholl

LISTED STATUS: Grade 2*

IN CONSERVATION AREA: Yes

LIST DESCRIPTION:

Roman Catholic Church. Designed and built between 1832 and 1835 by William Hallett; sculpture by John Carew. The ritual east end extended sixty feet in 1875 to designs by Gilbert Robot Blount; further additions between 1887 and 1890; wall decorations by Nathaniel Hubert Westlake from 1890 to 1921. Stucco. Roof of slate. PLAN: sanctuary of one bay; choir of 2 bays with

north and south chapels of two bays; aisleless nave; organ loft at the ritual west end; baptistery at the ritual south-west corner of the nave; entry porch at ritual north-west; entrance porch at ritual west end. Greek Revival Style; east end executed in Renaissance Revival style.

Exterior: ritual west front treated as a temple front with pediment to gabled roof and entablature bearing Latin inscription: Deo sub invoc. S. Joannis Bapt. The wall below has pilasters of the Composite Order to the outside corners; distyle in antis porch of the same order in the centre of the facade. Flat-arched entries to returns of porch; main entrance in centre of porch, flat arched with architrave, entablature and dentil cornice; pediment above with raking dentil cornice. Above centre entrance is a flat arched niche with architrave holding a statue of the Patron of the Church, St John the Baptist; the niche has a sill band which continues across the front walls on either side of the entrance. Above this sill band in the front walls is a flat-arched window with architrave; opening below the sill band set in pedimented aedicule is blocked. The south elevation was formerly hidden by Cell Block and Refectory of Saint Joseph's Convert, no 3 Bristol Road, recently demolished; on the north elevation there is one pilaster of the Composite order between each nave window. Porch to north-west of c1890 is single storey, with round-arched entrance in the ritual north face. Entrance framed by a Tuscan pilaster supporting arch with architrave and enlarged keystone, the whole, in turn, set in aedicule consisting of a pair of Tuscan pilasters with exaggerated entasis, entablature and pediment.

INTERIOR: choir and sanctuary are barrel vaulted with panelled transverse ribs; north and south chapels are cross vaulted. Transverse ribs in the sanctuary spring from pilasters of the Composite order and in the choir from a round-arched arcade on 2 bays, supported by a pilaster to the east wall, a column, and a square pier at the west end of the choir; responds along the north and south walls; all in the Composite Order; the arches have architraves. Viewed from the nave, the chancel arch and arches to side chapels treated as an arcade of 3 bays, with the central bay higher and broader than the sides; keystones of each treated as a console bracket; steps down to floor of nave. There is a segmental-arched window with shouldered and eared architrave and projecting sill in each bay of the sanctuary and choir. There are wood screens separating the north and south chapels from the choir, and a C17 Belgian altar rail, added in 1890. Nave is rectangular in plan with a plain dado and a dentil cornice at the top of the wall; along each side wall are four flat-arched windows. In the north and south walls under the second window from the east end is a segmental-arched door with eared architrave. Ceiling of nave plain, pierced by three ventilation ducts in the form of rosettes, added in 1890. At the west end is an organ gallery supported on 2 cast-iron columns with capitals of acanthus and palm leaves; entablature and painted gallery front which is topped by a wooden screen of thin, turned colonnettes on high socles; these support a nine-bay arcade of round and cusped arches; entablature above. Between each socle is a metal filigree railing. The centre bay of the arcade is the widest and gives a view of the organ. The baptistery, finished in 1889 and entered through a round diaphragm arch, contains the stone, low-relief sculpture of St John the Baptist and Christ. Executed by Carew ib c1835, which was the original altar piece.

Furnishings, decorations and monuments: the south chapel dedicated to Our Lady, stone altar consecrated in 1875, aediculed niche above with statue of the Virgin and Child. The north chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart of the same date; aediculed niche above the stone altar holds statue of Christ holding the Sacred Heart. The Baptistry, added in 1889 and entered through a round diaphragm arch, contains a stone, low-relief sculpture executed by Carew in c1835, and served as the original altarpiece; the subject: John the Baptist baptizing Christ; pavement of encaustic tile; round font on acanthus leaf base. Carew also carved 2 Composite capitals which flanked the original altar; it is likely that these were reused in the rebuilding of the east end. Under windows next to the organ gallery is a 3-bayed, round-arched niche in which sits the figure of a saint. The nave benches and pulpit date from 1890, in which year Nathaniel Hubert Westlake began the elaborate painted decorations which cover most of the interior wall surfaces; at the same time Westlake also designed the windows. Of especial note is the altar piece, an oil painting on canvas, which shows Christ Enthroned and Adored, with prophets and saints attending. The panels between the nave windows form a narrative cycle which depict the Life of the Church's patron saint; Westlake's last works, dating from 1917 to 1921, are a memorial to Father Johnston who served as assistant priest, then rector from 1876 to 1916. In the south wall next to the organ gallery, monument to Maria Fitzherbert (1756-1837), the Catholic widow who was married to the Prince of Wales in 1783 and who was disowned by the Prince Regent in 1811, although she continued to frequent Brighton. The monument shows her as widow with the Lamp of Memory and kneeling before the broken gospels, assuming the form either of Fidelity or Religion. She is wearing 3 wedding rings as Catholic ecclesiastical law requires. She was patroness of this congregation. In the same position on the north wall, a memorial to the Rev Edward Cullen (1776-1850), who built the church.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Hallett based his design closely on the Catholic church of St Mary, Moorfields, London, completed by the architect John Newman between 1817 and 1820. In the late 1880s, designs for a complete remodelling of the church in a Romanesque/Italian Renaissance style were made by S J Nicholl; these were shown at the Royal Academy in 1887 and published in "The Builder" for 21 May, 1887 and 1 September, 1888. (Pugh T: The Church of St John the Baptist, Brighton 1835-1985: Hove: 1985: 11-36).

POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS/ADDITIONS TO LIST DESCRIPTION AND/OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The church was opened on 7th July 1835. William Hallett was the builder and, it seems likely, the designer, closely modelling his design on St Mary Moorfield, London (since replaced). Samuel Joseph Nicholl (1826-1905) was articulated to J J Scoles (a Roman Catholic architect). The church was reopened on 31st October 1875 following the 60ft eastward extensions designed by G R Blount (new sanctuary and side chapels). S J Nicholl's proposals for major remodelling were not executed. After Canon Johnston became rector in 1887 improvements and additions were made, with Nicholl as the architect. He added the pulpit, communion rails, and the choir screens. Improvements

included the formation of ventilating shafts piercing the roof, the installation of a new organ as well as an electric light system throughout the church. Modifications included work on the baptistery and Calvary chapel.

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF CHURCH IF NOT LISTED: N/A

SOURCES D R Elleray *Sussex Places of Worship* 2004

The Builder 4th July 1874, p578 and 20th November 1875, p1047

The Builder 21st May 1887, p788; 1st September 1888, p158

The Building News 24th June 1887, p456; 24th August 1888, p236

STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE

An important church because of its early date, for its connection with Maria Fitzherbert and for the fine relief of the baptism of Christ by J E Carew.

