

Quiet and Controversy in and around a Church and Churchyard

and
How to Close a Churchyard concluded

Everyone knows how the people involved in churches love a good row! If you want to feel the weight of people getting divisive and venting their anger on each other, join a Church! The reality of church life is quite often at odds with what might be expected. On the surface, there is a tranquillity and sense of the numinous. Under the surface, there is a seething world of disagreements and broken expectations and when this breaks into the open, you often read about it in the newspapers!

The Holy Cross New Church was completed and opened almost 70 years ago now, whilst German aircraft were raining down bombs over London and the rest of England as well.



The Bishop of London, Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, dedicated the foundation stone of Holy Cross New Church in 1939. On the left stands the rector, Fr. Donald Harris whose energy and commitment made possible the building of a wonderful new church during a period of world war.

This is the Foundation Stone today, declaring the purpose of the Church and who did the business.



This photograph is of the interior of the new church in July 1940, and the congregation must have been delighted and excited to sit in the partially built structure, imagining what it would eventually be like when completed.

The Brownies and Cubs sat at the front must now be in the region of 85-90 years of age? This is an extraordinary photograph and like the other, was taken by a staff photographer of the Middlesex Gazette and prints of them hang in the New Church for the attention of our many interested visitors.

It all looks so optimistic, and so it was, of course, despite the weight of the second world war and the daily misery of reports from the battle fields of injury and death to family and friends taking up arms to prevent a fascist take-over of Europe and beyond.



Part of the design of the new church included the provision of a cavity, suitable for use as a Columbarium, directly underneath the High Altar. Looking back, this seems to me to be somewhat controversial. I do not know if it was considered so in 1941 when the church opened for worship. The High altar of a traditional Church in the Anglican Catholic tradition is a place where the bread and wine are consecrated and offered as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The presence below the surface of the church here of dusty human cremated remains could seem to have been an error.

The old altar area set out for a community Lunch. The hatch for entering the Columbarium is on the left near the door, as below.



Sharon from the Under 5s staff poses to demonstrate the depth of the Columbarium, with its content.

There are about 200 or so human remains still present and the conditions in which they are stored, I have to say, leaves much to be desired. The area is about three feet high and one needs to crawl on hands and knees to see the range of caskets. Some are wooden, some ornate metal, some plastic and some in plastic bags. The lighting in this cavity ceased to work long ago and the only access is a trap-door.

In the past, when people have asked for the removal of human remains for burial with a newly deceased partner, I have sent my (then) small children down to seek out the correct container and bring them up to the surface. I would reward them with £5 or a similar amount to compensate them for the scary, dusty and uncomfortable work they had done!

This Columbarium is a strange place and attracted the attention of my predecessor who wished to dispose of the Columbarium and the original High altar as part of a re-ordering of the church furnishings in 1976. His proposals were immediately opposed and in the end, the Chancellor of the Diocese held a Consistory Court in the building to hear the case for and against the proposal. When I arrived in the parish in 1982, the memory of these exciting events was still very fresh and the pain still felt deeply, on both sides.

I heard tales of anger and tears, as people wailed and shouted at the then rector, whose proposal attracted a good deal of personal abuse, none of which was, on reflection, appropriate or fair.

The Chancellor eventually ruled that he would allow the re-ordering of the furniture, and the provision of a wooden moveable altar in the centre of the church, but he refused the application to remove the original High altar and discontinue the Columbarium. The ashes were to stay in perpetuity, and ugly and uncomfortable as the Columbarium may be, we seem to be stuck with it.



The Holy Cross Garden of Remembrance.

The Chancellor changed the rules in order to restrict new deposits only to spouses of those already in the Columbarium from the date of the Consistory Court hearing and an area of the churchyard was set aside and consecrated for the purpose of the burial of cremated human remains in the future.

Some 32 years later, we are still using this area, although it is itself now coming to the point of being full.

What do we do next, I wonder?

Which brings me to the subject I addressed last quarter, how to close a churchyard!

The wheels are grinding, but ever so slowly.

A Public Notice was published in our local newspaper and after the statutory 21 days, no representations were received. The Ministry for Justice will next send the Parochial Church Council with a Notice for our Notice Board, announcing the plans again and advising us of 10 days in which we can change our minds or raise concerns. After this, the plan is that the Ministry will write to the Privy Council and ask for our closure to be put on an agenda for the next meeting. Ah, yes, summer recess is coming up, so that might mean another delay until the autumn? The Privy Council will then write to us with another 28 day Notice after which they will finally advise us of their decision to close the churchyard. Or not. Cor, what a palaver!



Neil Richardson

Holy Crosstide Parish Party

Everyone is invited to come to our annual Parish Party to mark our Feast of Title as Holy Cross Church which will be in the New Church on **Saturday 18th September, from 7pm.**

This year we will be enjoying a Barn Dance which will be suitable for all ages, so bring your children as well as their grandparents! There will be a charge for this party in order to defray the cost of the band, but at the time of writing, the charge has not yet been set. Watch out for Stop Press for more details soon.



The event is done on a Bring & Share food basis which means that you bring enough food for your own party, put it on the table with everyone else's and then everyone can choose their own food when the time comes to eat. Also, bring your own bottles of drink. And enjoy a great night out.