



**St. Stephen with St. John  
Westminster**  
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## A guide to the church building

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rochester Row was part of a notorious area of slums known as Devil's Acre. Surrounded by open sewers, the filthy tenements harboured every kind of criminal, and the local ropeyard was infested with rats.

This site was chosen by a remarkable woman, Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts, to build a new church as a memorial to her father, Sir Francis Burdett Bt, a former Radical Member of Parliament for Westminster. The land was given by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey.

**Angela Burdett-Coutts**, grand-daughter and heiress of the banker, Thomas Coutts, was a noted philanthropist. She built not only **the church**, but **the school** in Rochester Street which was opened in 1849, and still bears the name of Burdett-Coutts. **The almshouses** for elderly people opposite the church were also enriched by her gifts; and she endowed **a college** on the Vincent Square side of the church to help local citizens emigrate to the colonies, particularly to British Columbia where she had established two villages. In much of this work she was helped by her friend Charles Dickens. She was honoured by Queen Victoria in 1871 when she was created a Baroness in her own right, the first woman to receive such a title.

**The architect** chosen for St. Stephen's church was Benjamin Ferrey, a pupil and biographer of the more famous Pugin. The design he produced was based on the decorated style of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. His other works included the cathedral on the island of St. Helena, and the plans for the new town of Bournemouth.

**The foundation stone** was laid on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1847, and the church was consecrated on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1850, the Festival of the nativity of St. John the Baptist.

**THE EXTERIOR** is built of Bargate ragstone from Northumberland, near Blyth. The quoins and dressings are Morpeth sandstone. Unfortunately it cannot be cleaned.

**The original spire** was 184ft high, designed to be seen from the Baroness's drawing room in Piccadilly. It was struck by lightning in 1885 and had to be extensively repaired. Probably because of a bomb which fell in Rochester Row during World War II, the spire became unsafe and the top half was taken off in 1968. After 26 years with a truncated stump, the spire was restored to full height in 1994 with a top portion of polycarbonate cladding on a steel frame. The 32ft pinnacles had been rebuilt in 1985.

**The eight bells** were installed as part of the Baroness's endowment. Inside the belfry a plaque records the details of the first muffled peal which was rung on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1852 during the funeral of the great Duke of Wellington, also a friend of the Baroness.

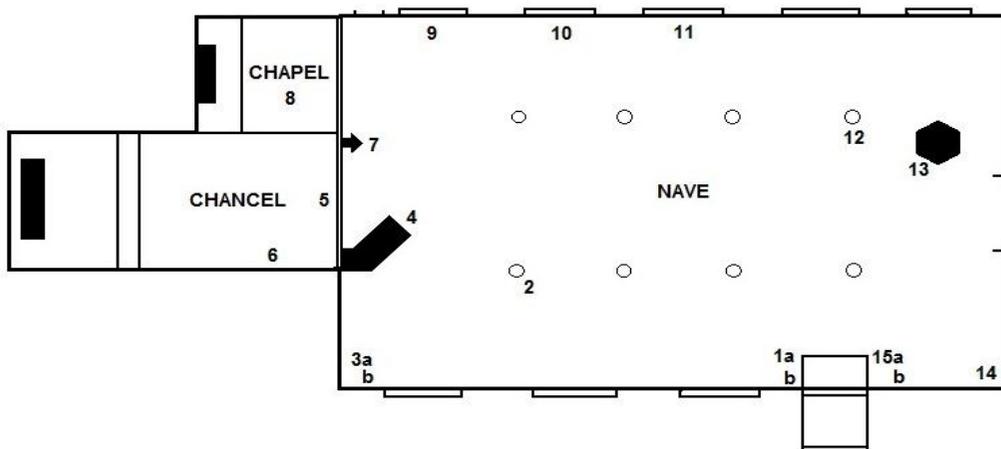
**The railings** outside the church were salvaged from a demolition site in Victoria Street and erected in 1986. At the same time a new garden was designed by Russell Coates of the Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley.

In the niche above **the porch** is a statue of St. Stephen kneeling in prayer for those who enter or pass by.

*Will you, too, please pray for all who live and work in this parish.*

**THE INTERIOR** is built with stone from Caen in Normandy. It is a particularly good stone for the fine carving which was done by Peter Wright of Vauxhall Bridge Road. Notice that the capitals at the top of the pillars are each of different design, and there are more than sixty heads at key points.

To follow these details, turn left inside the porch door and walk around the church.



1a. **Memorial** (by G.G. Adams 1885) to Dr William Brown and his wife Hannah who was first governess and then companion to Baroness Burdett-Coutts.

1b. **The shield** on the corbel shows the arms of the Diocese of Guildford. George Reindorp, Vicar of St. Stephen's 1946 - 57, was made by the Bishop of Guildford in 1961.

2. **The capital of the first column** is carved with eight heads. These include Queen Victoria, the Baroness, Bishop Blomfield and others connected with the church.

3a. **The Plaque** over the Vestry door incorporates the Sovereign's coat of arms within the Riband of the Garter surmounted by a Royal Crown. It was an old custom in many churches, to display the Royal Arms showing allegiance to the sovereign.

3b. **On the buttress** next to the Pulpit is a shield with the family arms of Richard Chartres, Vicar of St. Stephen's 1984 - 92 made Bishop of Stepney in 1992, and Bishop of London in 1996.

4. **The Pulpit** is of elaborate geometrical design. The text reads *'for all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flowers of the field. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth away but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.'*

1 Peter 1: 24 - 25.

## 5. **The Chancel**

The ceiling is decorated with stars and bosses carved with sacred symbols.

The floor covering is on Minton tiles by Hudson and West.

The inscription on the step records the consecration of the church.

The East Window was destroyed by bomb blast during the Second World War and replaced in 1947.

## **The Arms** are:

Diocese of London  
Diocese of Capetown  
Westminster Abbey  
Diocese of Adelaide  
Baroness Burdett-Coutts



**Silver** - The Cross was given in memory of Deaconess Constance Smith and the candlesticks in memory of Angela Mary Tennant.

6. **The Organ**, built originally by J.J. Binns for St. Thomas' Church, Leith, in 1903, was transferred to St. Stephen's in 2012 and installed by Andrew Cooper & Co. Organ Builders.

7. **The Brass Lectern** was given by members and friends of the guild of St. Stephen in 1887. The stand was given in memory of Clementine Moody in 1898.

8. **The Tennant Chapel** was dedicated on St. Stephen's Day 1904 in memory of Angela Tennant, daughter of the first Vicar and a god-daughter of the Baroness. The mosaic panels depict St. Stephen, St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. Edward the Confessor.



9. **Window of the Good Shepherd** by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1890).

10. **Bust of William Tennant**, Vicar of St. Stephen's 1849 - 79, sculpted by an ex-pupil of Burdett-Coutts School.

11. **St. Stephen's window** and remaining glass by Wailes (1850).

12. **The Font** - the bowl is ornamented with Christian symbols between four panels of the life of Christ. The text is from Isaiah 40:11 - *'He shall lead his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather his lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young.'*

13. Above the **West Door** the Baroness is depicted as an angel carrying a model of the church. The shield on the left bears the arms of Sir Francis Burdett; on the right the arms of the Baroness.

14. **The War Memorial** and Book of Remembrance of two World Wars.

15a. **Memorial** to W.A.G. Twining who was Curate for seven years and Vicar for thirty-four years.

15b. **The shield** on the corbel above bears the family arms of Anthony Tremlett, Vicar of St. Stephen's 1958 - 64, and later Bishop of Dover.