

Stained Glass at the Parish Church of St. John the Evangelist, Coulsdon

St. John's lost much of its stained glass when a bomb fell nearby in WWII. (It is not far from Kenley fighter base.) But some survived and more has been added. Unfortunately much is placed where ordinarily few people get a good look at it. Seek them out, either in person or in [the virtual tour](#), and enjoy them in colour.

Angels

In the north-west corner of the New Church is a wooden partition. Inside is a rarely used door and a [window](#) about God's promise to Israel. The top part is the making of that promise, Jacob's dream (Genesis 28). The lower part is the fulfilment of that promise, the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Archangel Raphael (Luke 1). The texts are "Will God indeed dwell on the Earth" and "The Word was made flesh".



On the base of the pillar on the Virgin's right is a spider's web with the initials "GW". This is the mark of Geoffrey Fuller Webb (1879-1954). The dedication is "John James Gulland 1910". His grave, marked with a Celtic cross, is near the southern exit of the Garden of Remembrance. It is also the grave of his wife, Agnes Edith, and son, John, a Colonel in the Indian Army who died in 1955, as noted on the lobby chart.

The Good Shepherd

[This window](#) is something of a mystery. It is hidden behind a staircase we are no longer allowed to use. The six line inscription does not make sense until you realize it is a wider two line inscription cut into three parts. The lines are to be read in the order 1, 3, 5, 2, 4, 6.

A D M G IN LOVING MEMORY
THE ADJACENT CHURCHYARD
OF ARCHIBALD JOHN O'CONNELL JONES A
THIS WINDOW WAS RESTORED AND
DEAR SON WHOSE GRAVE IS IN
BEAUTIFIED BY HIS PARENTS 1935

The text "I am the Good Shepherd" is from John 10. "ADMG" is "Ad Dei Maiorem Gloriam" - "To the Greater Glory of God".

St. John's has no faculty for 1935. Possibly it is one light of a former three light window and the maker's mark was in one of the others. [A sketch of the south side](#) before the new church was built which shows just such a window in a wall that no longer exists.

Jones died in 1934 and his grave is in the southern part of the churchyard. It can be seen on our website. On the [panorama of this part](#) look towards the Sun. The nearest stone, surmounted by a cross, marks the grave. If you seek it in person, walk along the main path. Just before a tree there is a path to the right. It is the 2nd grave beyond on the same side.

Where did the Angel and Good Shepherd windows come from? Both are older than the walls they are set in. Presumably they are from walls lost when the new church was built but the original locations have not been traced.

Archbishops

Our [oldest windows](#) of known date are in the church lounge. They depict Archbishops of Canterbury: Augustine (597-c604), Theodore of Tarsus (668-690), Lanfranc (1070-1089) and Anselm (1093-1109). Augustine introduced the Roman Church to England and the founders of Coulsdon may have been resisting conversion. Theodore reformed the English church and was the principal founder of a school at Canterbury which ushered in the “Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon scholarship”. Note that Lanfranc does not have a halo as he is the only one who is not a Saint, though there is a school in Croydon named in his honour. He was of enormous importance in English history as an ally of William of Normandy and his son, William Rufus. The book Anselm holds appears also on his seal and alludes to his work founding scholasticism.



The wheat sheaf in the windows of Augustine and Lanfranc shows that the designer is Charles Eamer Kempe (1837-1907). The inscription commemorates Churchwarden Walter Ieken Stride who died in 1899.

Evangelists

After a service, go in to the Sanctuary of the Old Church and look up at the [windows](#) on [either side](#). They show the Evangelists, the Apostles whose accounts of the life of Christ became the Gospels. Most people only see these at an angle if at all. Three carry books to show that they are Evangelists but that is unnecessary for St. John in this church. Under the images are their symbols of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. St. Matthew, Patron Saint of bankers, has a moneybag. The lions of St. Mark in Venice are a famous tourist sight. Saint Luke carries pens as the writer of Acts. St. John has a serpent emerging from a chalice identifying him with St. John of Revelation who traditionally survived assassination by poison.

The dedication under the south side windows is to William Arthur Kelk (1866-1948), a priest here for over 40 years and now at rest in our churchyard. His grave is in the 2nd row south of the Garden, about halfway between the main entrance and the small southern entrance.



In St. Matthew's window look to the left of the winged man. There you will find the mark of Alfred L Wilkinson. Compare the styles in the Old Church. Of St Barnabas, Heigham, Norwich it is said “The Wilkinson windows have such a bright and joyful spirit that they make the Kempe windows seem more ponderous than they really are.” Is that true of ours?

Christ in Majesty

[Above the New Church altar](#) is Christ in Majesty with the Dove of the Trinity above. With the [baldachino](#) in place it is difficult to get close enough to see details. These include stigmata on the hands and feet though that on the right hand is almost hidden by the thumb.

Near the left foot is the mark of Comper and Bucknall and the date, 1960. The window is attributed to John Bucknall, the last partner of Sir Ninian Comper, but Comper influenced the design. The youthful Christ is a typical Comper touch used in other windows such as that at Manby in Lincolnshire.



Makers and Marks

Our oldest and newest windows are linked by their makers.

Charles Kempe had a stammer which frustrated his calling to the Ministry so he turned instead to church decoration and became a leading producer of stained glass. His coat of arms included wheat sheaves so he adopted that as his mark. He was succeeded by his young cousin, architect Walter Tower. A year or two after Charles's death he added a tower to the wheat sheaf.

John Ninian Comper (1864-1960) was a Scottish architect who came south where he worked with Kempe who set off his interest in stained glass which Comper accurately called "painted glass". He was articled to Bodley & Garner from 1883 to 1887 then taken into partnership by William Bucknall (1851-1944) in 1888. Bucknall also was a Scot and a former pupil of Bodley. Comper's father was a Minister noted for his work with the poor. He died suddenly whilst giving strawberries to poor children. In tribute Bucknall and Comper adopted a strawberry plant as their mark.

Comper was the artistic heart of the firm, designing and decorating churches to fulfil the role of a roof for the altar. Bucknall's structural experience and skill enabled Comper's ideas to be turned into reality. In 1890 Comper married Bucknall's sister Grace. The Bucknall family handled the business side and became increasingly important in the firm. Granddaughter Naomi Comper recounted that Grace got housekeeping money directly from the Bucknalls. About 1904 Bucknall left the firm and his nephew, Arthur Bucknall, became chief assistant and later a partner in Comper and Bucknall. He is believed to have made a window for St. Andrew's. When he died in 1952, he was replaced as partner by his second son, John Samuel Bucknall. Some sources state that John was William's grandson but William had no son. The confusion may be because Arthur was for a time eclipsed in the firm by Comper's son Sebastian. After Comper's death, John added a bee to the mark.

Comper spent his later years in Norwood and was first President of the Norwood Society. He considered architecture an art, not a profession, and described himself in "Who's Who" as "Architect, unregistered".

There is also a link to the Angel window as Geoffrey Fuller Webb worked with Kempe and his brother, Christopher Ratherne Webb (1886-1966), was articled to Comper.

Sources and Further Reading

- Wikipedia - Charles Eamer Kempe, Sir Ninian Comper, Nicholas Comper, Christopher Webb
- [Vitrearum's Church Art](#)
- [Kempe Society](#)
- St. Andrew's, [own site](#) and [Southwark site](#)
- [Sussex Parish Churches](#)
- [Scottish Architects](#) - William Bucknall, Ninian Comper

Since the original article was written, this site has undergone extensive revision.

- [Norwood Society](#)
- [Sisters of Bethany](#)
- [St. John the Evangelist, East Dulwich](#)

This is a revision of an article originally to have been published in St. John's Parish Magazine. Only the first part appeared, in August 2010.