



Garden of Memory

The revamp of this garden was completed in **2007**. The path was re-laid to render it safe for wheelchair users and the gateway repainted. Claire Ellis of 'Complete Gardens' designed a new layout of plants and advised on replanting. The labour for clearing, weeding and planting was provided by local people associated with the church, and carried out under the guidance of Sue Ratcliffe of 'Botany Bay Nurseries'.

2019-2022 During the last few years we have relied heavily on volunteers to keep the garden tidy but Covid and last summer's long dry spell made this difficult.

2023 onwards We are very grateful to **Astwood Bank in Bloom** firstly adding the daffodils and sorting the church front beds and then for coming to our rescue in the spring and working hard to return the Garden of Memory to a pleasant place to reflect and remember our loved ones.



Why not hold your wedding in your parish church?

Apply to Rev Fiona for details

office@astwoodbank.org.uk

Baptisms and funerals can also be arranged

Sunday Services:-

1st Sunday

4pm Holy Communion

2nd Sunday

4pm Family Service

3rd Sunday

10.30am Holy Communion

4th Sunday

4pm Sunday Worship (Evensong)

5th Sunday (varies - see kerbside notice board)

Midweek Services

Tuesday 10am said Holy Communion traditional language or Morning Prayer

Coffee Stop

Third Wednesday each month 2pm to 3.45pm, **term time only**, every one welcome, join us for tea and cake.

History of Astwood Bank Church



Origins

At the beginning of the 19th Century Astwood Bank, Crabbs Cross and Hunt End were small villages on the outskirts of Redditch and part of the large ecclesiastical Parish of Feckenham. In 1801 the combined population of the three villages was no more than 250 people. In the 1881 census some 2,400 persons lived in this N.E. corner of the parish, yet had to travel at least 2 miles to their nearest church down narrow country lanes. In August 1881 a new vicar, the Rev Thomas Rooke, was appointed to Feckenham and having noted the growth of the population began to consider means whereby a church could be built on the Ridge. On the 1st February 1882 he held a Wednesday evening service in the village school and was surprised at the huge attendance. The Wednesday evening services continued weekly, supplemented by occasional festival services, until the last service in the schoolroom was held on the 10th August 1884, the eve of the consecration of the first part of the church to be built.

Early Beginnings:

The first meeting to discuss the project was held on 23rd February 1882. Several prominent local persons associated with the parish of Feckenham met under the chairmanship of the Vicar and agreed to build a church in Astwood Bank on land kindly donated by Sir Harry Foley Vernon. The original plot of land measured 170 feet in depth from the road and 130 feet along the road (the present east, north and south boundaries) the original west boundary being a line from the existing roadside gate pillar along the Vicarage hedge.

The remainder of the site was given, or purchased, at various times from 1891 onwards. The present hall, originally stables, was given by Sir Harry Vernon in 1891 to house the Sunday School. It was extended in 1923 to its present size and approximate layout. The land between the hall and the church was purchased in 1919 and the Vicarage built in 1926 since it was difficult to obtain the services of a married curate without the provision of a house.

The Church:

The original plan was for a church seating 600 persons but the immediate task, based on funds available – was to build the chancel, the base of the tower and the outer walls of the vestries and complete the building when funds became available. (The building first used in 1884 could accommodate 200 people.) The church was designed by the Diocesan Architect, in the Decorated style of the 14th century and the builder was Henry Surnam of Astwood Bank. Lady Georgina Vernon laid the foundation stone on 31st May 1883, and the first part of the building completed and consecrated on 11th August 1884. The arch separating the chancel from the nave rises 41 feet from floor to apex. The proposed nave was to be 83 feet long by 53 feet

wide; the roof to be supported by pairs of pillars at equidistant from each other. The height from the floor of the nave to the apex of the roof would measure 56 feet. The structure was to be built of Bromsgrove stone with the inner walls of the chancel faced with brick.

Consecration:

At the consecration service a number of gifts were made including the altar cross, gift of the Dowager Marchioness of Hereford, in memory of her husband. A Glastonbury Chair gift of Mr A Marshall, Patron of the Feckenham living; a credence table and baptismal shell from Bethlehem given by the Rev Rooke. On the 14th March 1886 the Vicar was presented with a service of silver vessels for the celebration of Holy Communion. The service consisted of a silver chalice; a silver paten with inscription and silver mounted rub-glass flagon, all in a polished oak case. A Birmingham firm – Jones & Willis, made the chalice and paten. The gift is inscribed on the paten with the following:-

‘Presented with chalice and cruet, to the Rev Thomas Rooke, for the use of the church of Ss Matthias & George, Astwood Bank, by the Duke of Westminster, J A Shaw Stewart Esq., Colonel F Haygarth and other friends of his and St George’ Hospital, London 1885.’



Nave:

When the nave was eventually built in 1911 the vast space envisaged in the original plan was reduced to 51 feet and width of 39 feet with two pairs of pillars supporting the roof. This space is thus less than half that considered necessary in 1882 and in consequence there is incorrect balance between the chancel and the nave. The nave building was entrusted to Geo. Huxley and Co of Astwood Bank and building commenced on the 24th April 1911. The foundation stone was laid on the 6th June 1911 and the building consecrated on 25th October 1911 by Bishop Mylne, Rector of Alvechurch, who had been Bishop of Bombay from 1876 to 1897 and served in the Salisbury diocese before coming to Alvechurch in 1905.

Dedication:

The church is dedicated to St Matthias and St George – an unusual double dedication in the Church of England. The dedication came about because on the death of the previous incumbent of Feckenham a problem arose as to who was the patron of the parish church. Eventually on the sale of an advowson (the right of presentation to a benefice) left by a Mrs Hutcheson to be divided between three parties, the parties failed to agree as to who should present the next incumbent to the living of Feckenham. A Judge in Chancery decided that they should draw lots. The lot fell to the Corporation of St George’s Hospital; London and the governors exercised their right by offering the living to their chaplain of eleven years, Thomas Rooke. The name of the church therefore refers to “the lot” which had, in the new vicar’s case as in the original St Matthias, cast him in the role, and in reference to the name of the hospital whose governors had offered him the living as a result of the lot-casting.