

# Kingsbury's Recycled Church

As you approach Church Lane from Blackbird Cross, the tall spire-topped tower of the Grade II\* listed Saint Andrew's Church, on a small rise ahead of you, makes an imposing sight. The church's style is clearly "Victorian Gothic", and yet it only opened its doors to serve the local community in the 1930's. This article tells the story behind these apparently conflicting facts.

## St. Andrew's New Church, from Tudor Gardens.

[Photograph by Philip Grant, September 2009]

For more than 800 years up to the early 1920's, the original St Andrew's Church had served a small, mainly rural area (see the article "St Andrew's Old Church, Kingsbury"). The 1921 census showed that the population of the whole Kingsbury district was just 1,856 people, and



most of those lived in the areas around The Hyde, Kingsbury Green and Roe Green. Most of the local roads were narrow country lanes, but that was about to change after Wembley Park was chosen as the site for the British Empire Exhibition. As the government expected millions of people to visit the Exhibition, it provided funds to widen and improve roads such as Blackbird Hill (then known as Kingsbury Lane), Church Lane and Forty Lane.

## The area around St Andrew's (Old) Church in 1920.

Reproduced from the 1920 edition of the Ordnance Survey 6 inch to one mile map of Middlesex, Sheet XI.

[Source: Brent Archives – maps collection]

The popularity of the British Empire Exhibition in 1924/25 saw many people want to live in the leafy surrounding areas, and soon many of the fields shown on the map above were being built over for estates of suburban houses. By the 1931 census, Kingsbury's population had increased to 16,636, and the numbers were still growing fast as developers like Salmon Estates built more homes. The old St Andrew's Church was now too small for the people who wanted to use it.

A property advertisement from the "Willesden Chronicle", 8 June 1934.

[Source: Brent Archives – local newspaper microfilms]

**WE HAVE THE HOUSE YOU WANT**

YOUR HOUSE OF THE FUTURE should be a sound investment. We offer you the choice of modern cottage types on the highest and most desirable positions in the district. Good value and position will secure your investment. Well planned, soundly built and beautifully finished, our properties are of superior quality. We are open from 9.0 a.m. till 5.0 p.m. and an inspection will convince you.

**SALMON STREET**  
 2325 to 2327, finished and semi-detached, covered with best roof, 3 rooms, walk from Blackbird Cross (Buses 5, 46, 52 & 53), 5 minutes' walk from Kingsbury Green (Buses 52, 46, & 53), fronting public highway, a 15. mile ride from Wembley Park Station.

**LANGDON DRIVE**  
 2325 to 2327, finished and semi-detached, 3 and 4 bed rooms, on highest ground, beautiful view, and large, wide garden, 5 minutes' walk to Buses 52 & 53.

**GLENWOOD GROVE**  
 2320 to 2307, covered and semi-detached, 4 light at Lovers' Avenue, off Church Lane, Buses 22 & 52.  
 Many attractive, built properties, dry and matured, ready for immediate occupation. No deposit in advance.



THE PADDOCKS ESTATE  
 Estate Agents, 100, Kingsbury Lane, Kingsbury, N.W.9.

**NINE FULLY DECORATED SHOW HOUSES TO SELECT FROM. NO RESERVATIONS**

**SALMON ESTATE** Salmon Street, Kingsbury, N.W.9.  
 Phone: Colindale 9261.

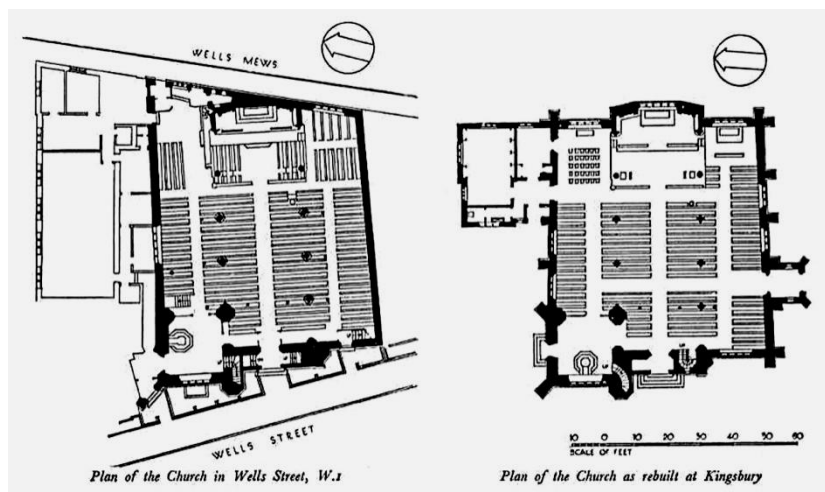
At the same time that Kingsbury's St Andrew's had become too small, another St Andrew's Church, just off Oxford Street in Central London, became redundant. The building in Wells Street, promoted by the "high church" Ecclesiological Society and designed by William Dawkes, had opened in January 1847. Through the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it flourished as a fashionable West End church with a fine reputation for its music, and many wealthy supporters. After Queen Victoria's time its congregation had dwindled, as the area around it changed from high-class homes to shops and offices. Its last service was held on Easter Day in 1931.



**St Andrew's Wells Street in 1848.**  
[Source: St Andrew's Church archive.]

There was a public outcry for this magnificent 1840's "Gothic Revival" building to be saved, and in 1932 the Bishop of London approved a suggestion to move the disused church to Kingsbury. W.A. Forsyth, F.R.I.B.A. was appointed as architect for the project, and had to work out how to modify a church that had previously been between two other buildings for an open site. He did this by putting windows in what had previously been

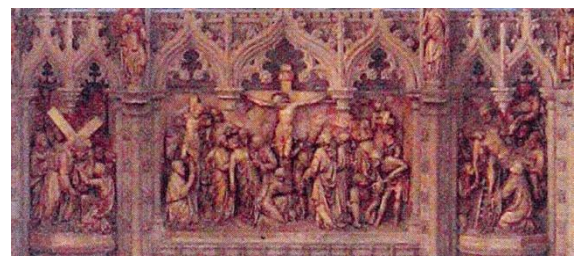
party walls, and adding a new porch to the south side and vestries on the north of the building, using bricks that matched the colour of the original Kentish ragstone walls and Bath stone dressings.



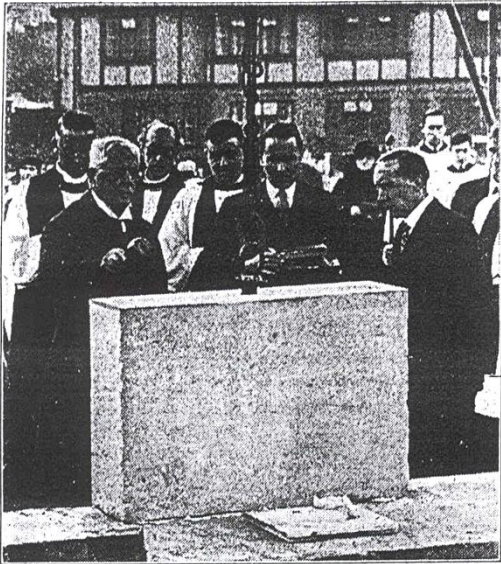
**The church plan at Wells Street and Forsyth's plan for it at Kingsbury.**  
[Source: The Journal of the R.I.B.A., 13/10/1934, courtesy of Fr. John Smith]

The work of taking apart the church at Wells Street was particularly important, as the building featured work by many famous 19<sup>th</sup> century designers and craftsmen. The original 1840's church had a high altar and stained glass windows by Augustus Pugin, and the building had been adorned with many beautiful additions in the years when Fr. Benjamin Webb was vicar (1862-1885), including a huge carved Caen Stone screen behind the altar, and the pulpit and chancel wrought ironwork, by George Edmund Street. All of the internal fittings and the stained glass were carefully removed. The most difficult part of this was dismantling the screen, which also included alabaster sculptures by James Redfern, so that it would not be damaged. This was done by removing the wall behind it in stages, and gently parting the stone sections of this "reredos" with soft wooden wedges.

**James Redfern's sculpture of the crucifixion.**  
[Detail from photograph by Fr. John Smith]



Once the internal details had been removed, the church itself was taken apart stone by stone, with every one carefully numbered, and a fleet of lorries moved them the eight miles to the low hill beside the churchyard of Old St Andrew's. While the church was being dismantled in Central London, Holland & Hannen and Cubitts, the contractors, had been putting down thick reinforced concrete foundations at the Church Lane site, to stop the "new" church from sinking into the clay. The corner stone was laid here by Lord Aldenham on 14 October 1933, and soon the church was rising in its new home.



J. L. Grimm.  
Lord Aldenham laying the foundation stone of St. Andrew's Church, Kingsbury, on Saturday. Behind him is the Bishop of Willesden.

**A photograph showing the foundation stone being laid, from the "Wembley News", 20 October 1933.**

[Source: Brent Archives - local newspaper microfilms.]

could see the site from the kitchen of her new home nearby remembered years later what an amazing thing it was to watch the church going up. Another man, who lived near Stanmore at the time, had memories of family walks as a boy to picnic by the Welsh Harp, and the excitement of seeing how much the new church had grown with each visit.



**Workmen sorting the stones at Kingsbury, late 1933.**

[Old photograph courtesy of Alan Edwards.]

It was not just local people who were fascinated. Sightseers came to Kingsbury to watch the work in progress, after reading about the project in newspaper and magazine articles. Newsreel teams visited Church Lane to film the work, and the project even attracted international attention. American newspapers called the rebuilding of Saint Andrew's more than 20,000 pieces:

“the World's largest jigsaw puzzle”.



A MAZE OF STEEL scaffolding at present encloses St. Andrew's Church, Kingsbury, the fabric of which has been removed from St. Andrew's, Wells Street, W. It is anticipated that the work will be finished in the early autumn.

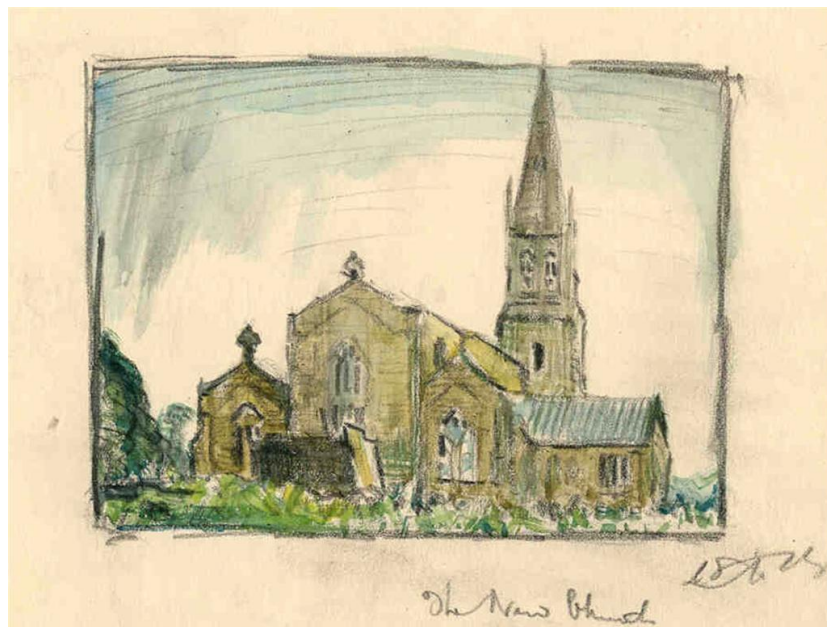
**A cutting from the "Wembley News", 9 February 1934.**

[Source: Brent Archives – local newspaper microfilms.]

During the winter and spring of 1934 the walls of the church rose, surrounded by steel scaffolding. Then the original wooden roof trusses were put back in place, and covered with new slates, as the old ones were badly perished. The outside work was finished off by adding the spire and pinnacles to the top of the tower. By June the exterior of the church was finished, and the peal of eight bells was re-hung in the tower.

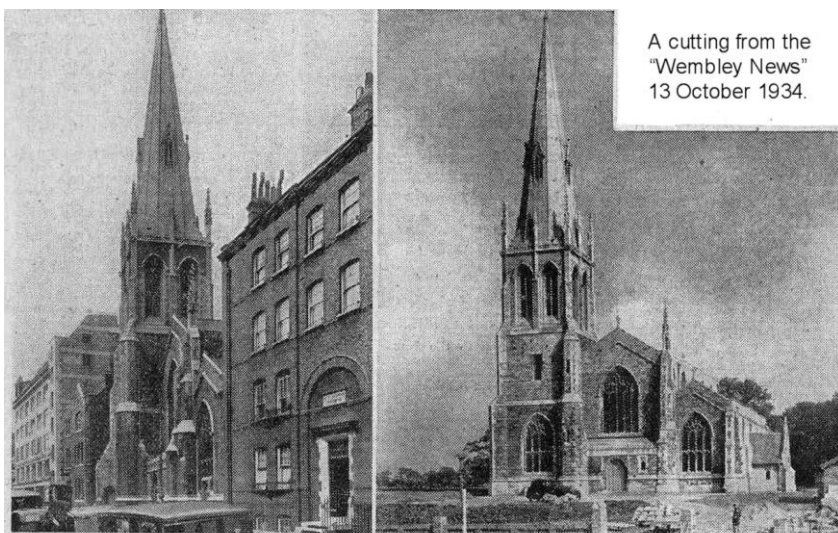
**A watercolour sketch of “The New Church” painted by local amateur artist L.S. Hill on 13 June 1934.**

[Source: Brent Archives - Wembley History Society Collection]



The fine sculptures, paintings and ironwork were put back in a faithful restoration of the interior, and by October the work was completed. Strangely, although none of it appeared to be missing, one small piece of stone from the “reredos” screen was left over. According to

the “Wembley News”, thirteen hundred people crowded into St Andrew’s on 13 October 1934 to celebrate its consecration by the Bishop of London, Bishop Winnington-Ingram. Hundreds more stood outside the landmark building, to watch the opening of southern Kingsbury’s “new” parish church.



A cutting from the “Wembley News” 13 October 1934.

ST. ANDREW’S CHURCH as it was, in Wells-street, W. (left), and as it is at Kingsbury, Middlesex, where it was taken stone by stone. It is to be dedicated to-day by the Bishop of London.

[Source: Brent Archives – Wembley History Society Collection]

The character of the building may have been altered by moving it from the city centre to a leafy suburb, but the new site allowed a better appreciation of the outside of the church, while the extra windows meant that visitors could enjoy the colour and detail of the inside decoration more than in the dim light at Wells Street. As one writer said at the time: *‘Kingsbury has acquired a church of quality that stands out with strong dignity in its new surroundings of raw speculative villas.’*

© Philip Grant, April 2013.

This article is based on material prepared for an exhibition at St Andrew’s Church in Kingsbury. A shorter version appeared as a “Secret History” item in the Brent Magazine (September 2009), and a longer booklet version called “How the New Church came to Kingsbury” was compiled for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations at the church in October 2009.