

## St Martin's Church, Blackheath

The church was dedicated on 26 July 1893 by Bishop Thorold of Winchester. The initiative to build a church to serve the growing community in Blackheath was taken by Sir William Roberts-Austin K.C.B. a former Deputy Master of the Royal Mint who was a resident of Blackheath and a Lay Reader in Wonersh. It is named after St Martin's Canterbury with which Sir William's family had connections, and in the churchyard of which he was afterwards buried in 1902. Before the building was complete, services were conducted fortnightly in the cottage that is now the vestry of the church and worshippers were summoned by the ringing of a large dinner bell by his servant.



The original idea was to use the nave of the new church as a village hall on weekdays, however this was avoided when Mr Henry Prescott gave the funds to construct the present Village Hall. He also gave the Church the Chancel Screen, the organ and securities as the endowment for the Curate-in-charge.

A scheme was launched in 1928 uniting Blackheath with Chilworth, comprising portions of the parishes of Wonersh, Shalford and St Martha's into a separate Church District. After a trial period it was decided to continue the scheme and in 1932 fundraising was started to establish an Endowment Fund to form a Parish. This was achieved in 1937 and Consecration by the Bishop of Guildford took place in September of that year. St Martin's has since 1998 formed part of the Parish of Wonersh with Blackheath and shares its' Vicar and Ministry Team.

This beautiful little church was designed by the Art Nouveau architect Charles Harrison Townsend and was a prime example of the work of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It is said to have been modelled on an Italian wayside chapel, but it is admirably suited to its surroundings on an English heath. It is in basilican form (oblong hall) instead of the traditional cruciform (cross shape). The Arts and Crafts movement pursued sincerity and simplicity, avoiding lofty and grand design and employed local materials such as the candleholders and lectern, made from ironstone from the heath and smelted at the Royal Mint.



### Blackheath's Wall Paintings

The striking wall paintings were painted in 1894-95 by Anna Lea Merritt, an American artist trained in Europe, who developed a style used by Pre-Raphaelite painters of her day. She was the first woman artist to have work acquired by the Tate collection ('Love Locked Out' which echoes Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World' can still be seen at the Tate Gallery). The technique used for the wall painting was revolutionary, using silicon based paints for the first time to resist the effects of damp and deterioration. This explains remarkable success in retaining the lightness and quality of the colours. She and Sir William Roberts-Austin presented a paper on the new technique to the Society

of Arts, chaired by Holman Hunt, in 1895 (Mural Painting by the Aid of Soluble Silicates and Metal Oxides, with Examples chiefly from St Martin's Womersley - Journal of the Society of Arts Vol XLIV December 6th 1895 pp39-51).

The paintings depict a number of scenes from the Life of Christ. She describes painting these in her book of memoirs. These paintings ensure that even the walls of the church point to the central focus of the Christian faith; to Jesus Christ the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again for us. As a parish our purpose is to know Christ and to make him known and this beautiful building serves us well in this mission.



**Virgin and Child in the manger.**

With St Joseph keeping back the cows while shepherds guided by angels came in, adoring.

Matthew 1-2



**The Resurrection, Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene.**

Note the large flat block of stone, like a millstone fitted to run in grooves below and above.

The preparatory oil painting was "Watchers of the Straight Gate"

Matthew 28:1-7



**Christ on the Mount of Olives**

The three disciples asleep at his feet.

Matthew 26:36-46



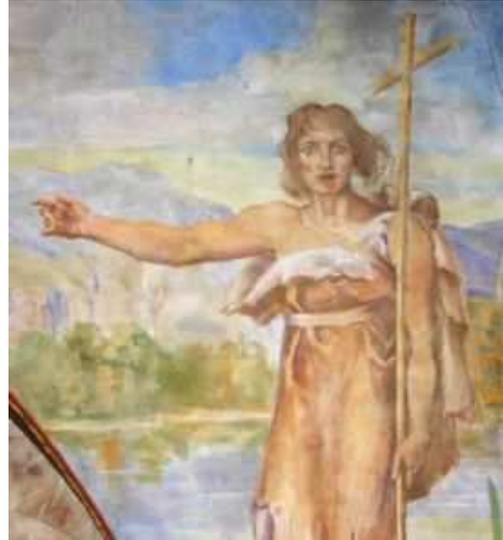
**The Raising of the Widow's Son**

Luke 7:11-16



**St Martin giving his coat to the beggar**

With the churches of St Martin's Canterbury  
and St Martin's Blackheath.



**St John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness**

Shown as an unusually youthful figure.



**Angel bearing symbol of the Eucharist**

"I will give you a crown of eternal life"

## Church Features

The alabaster work lining the chancel walls and sanctuary arch is the work of Messrs John Daymond and Son of London. It was for the most part a memorial to Sir William Roberts-Austin who lived in Blackheath, and whose initiative it was to build a church to serve the growing community. A wall tablet records:-

*To the Glory of God  
And in memory of  
Sir William Roberts Austen KCB,FRS,DCL  
To whose generous and devoted efforts  
The erection of this church was largely done  
His friends completed the decoration in 1904  
Born March 3 1843 – Died Nov 22 1902*

There is a second wall tablet on the opposite side:-

*To the Glory of God and in memory of  
Henry Warner Prescott  
Born January 15 1837  
Died November 10 1926  
For thirty years a humble worshiper in this church  
I had rather be a door keeper in the house of my God  
Than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness.  
Psalm 84 Verse 11*

The crucifix window in the pulpit recess of Christ on the Cross is by F Hamilton Jackson, and this and the copper pulpit desk are in memory of John Bell, the inventor of asbestos. He lived at Lockner and worshipped in this church.

The font “In memory of Elizabeth Oliveria Prescott” was given by Misses L E and O Prescott



The Roll of Honour for Blackheath is on the north wall with a wooden enclosure outside the church which contains some additional information:

<p><i>Roll of Honour</i></p> 	<p>1914 – 1918 In Memoriam</p>			
<p><i>Further details of those on the Roll of Honour may be found by searching the <a href="#">Commonwealth War Graves Commission</a>.</i></p>				<p><i>Additional text outside church</i></p>
<p><i>All are also remembered on the Roll of Honour at St John the Baptist, Womersley.</i></p>	<p>Frank Frederick <a href="#">Hayward</a></p>	<p>L Cpl 2nd Bt. The Queens</p>	<p>1914 Belgium</p>	<p>Aged 21. The Queens (S Africa &amp; Bermuda) Missing Nov 7<sup>th</sup>. 1916 at Ypres after retaking the trenches. "Cheer up there's a rainbow in the sky"</p>
<p><i>The war dead are also commemorated on the war memorial situated up on the heath.</i></p>	<p>James Charles <a href="#">Mant</a></p>	<p>Ld St RN HMS Invincible</p>	<p>1916 Jutland</p>	<p>Aged 29. May 31<sup>st</sup> 1916. Which sank at the battle of Jutland. "So long but not goodbye."</p>
	<p>William Charles <a href="#">Callingham</a></p>	<p>Pte 74th Canadian Regiment</p>	<p>1916 France</p>	<p>Aged 32. "Died of wounds received in the trenches"</p>
<p>Leonard George <a href="#">Edwards</a></p>	<p>Pte 7th Bt TheQueens</p>	<p>1916 France</p>	<p>Aged 21. Killed at Ferincourt July 15<sup>th</sup>. "He in a short while fulfilled a long while"</p>	
<p>Frank <a href="#">Hardwicke</a></p>	<p>Pte 1st Bt 29thLondon Regiment</p>	<p>1917 France</p>		
<p>Henry James <a href="#">Hayward</a></p>	<p>Pte 6th Bt TheQueens</p>	<p>1917 France</p>	<p>Aged 23. Died of wounds receives bringing a message as a Queens runner.</p>	
<p>Charles Basil Mortimer <a href="#">Hodgson</a></p>	<p>Capt 3rd Bt TheQueens</p>	<p>1918 Egypt</p>	<p>Died in Cairo hospital April 12th 1918 from wounds</p>	

				received in Palestine March 9 <sup>th</sup> . Served in France, Gallipoli and Palestine.
	Cyril Arthur Godwin <a href="#">Hodgson</a>	Capt R N Devon Hussars	1918 Egypt	Royal North Devon Hussars. Died in Cairo hospital March 20 <sup>th</sup> 1918 after serving in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine.
Glory to God in the Highest on Earth Goodwill Toward Men				



*With thanks to David Legg for reproduction of this document*