

St. James' Anglican Church

by Allan Duncan

Warden of St. James' Anglican Church 1997-2002



Father Henry Glynn Fiennes-Clinton, first rector of St. James' Anglican, the little wooden church by the sea, built in 1881.

ST. JAMES' ANGLICAN CHURCH occupies the northeast corner of Gore and Cordova Streets with a fortress-like presence. Although the youngest structure in the quarter-block church complex—the adjacent Parish Hall on Gore and Clergy House on Cordova date from 1925 and 1927—, the church itself is an architectural gem with an imposing hexagonal tower that rises 120 feet above the sidewalk and contains one of the city's largest array of eight huge bells that have been rung three times every day since the church was consecrated in 1938.

The current St. James' is the third church of the parish, which was established in 1881, five years before the city itself was chartered. Parish founder and Manager of Hastings Mill, Captain James A. Raymur, convinced hesitant church officials in the colonial capital of New Westminster that worshipers in Gastown, who had been meeting in halls and bars, needed their own church, and a small wooden structure was built on the waterfront. A plaque marking the original location of the building can still be seen just west of the Main Street overpass on Alexander Street. Raymur named the church after himself and, thanks to his friendship with William C. Van Horne, a second church was built in 1886 at the present site on land donated by the CPR. But not, of course, before the parish's first Rector, Father Henry Fiennes-Clinton, had rung the church bell, warning everyone of the imminent danger posed by the Great Fire that took out the whole of Gastown and the first St. James' Church.

The second church, a larger English country-style, post-and-beam structure, stood on this site until the mid thirties, when it was torn down to make way for the current, permanent church, as the present building had always been referred to in the years leading up to its construction. English architect Adrian Gilbert Scott managed to fit the new church between the Parish Hall and Clergy House without ever visiting the site. The building was a trend-setter in both design and fixtures. Completed in 1936, in a modern interpretation of 14th-century Gothic style, it was one of the first buildings in Vancouver to feature cast exposed concrete and piping imbedded in the concrete floor, which heats the building to this day.

Opposite

DETAIL OF HAND-EMBROIDERED COPE. This garment is a liturgical vestment that may be described as a very long mantle or cloak, open in front and fastened at the breast with a band or clasp.



The original St. James' Anglican Church perishes in the Vancouver Fire of 1886 while survivors cling to logs in the Burrard Inlet.

The rich liturgical traditions of St. James' are evident in the interior fittings and appointments of the building and impressive collections of vestments, mass hardware, lace and other craftwork. Every architectural detail has a story—a stone altar taken from the same quarries as was the stone for Liverpool Cathedral, a “player bell carillon” that plays changes, hymns etc. from rolls, an ancient Ethiopian processional cross as well as an elaborately detailed altar and credence table hand carved and crafted by a parishioner in remembrance of his son who died in the First World War. Many items still in use today, such as statues from Oberammergau and the elaborate hand-embroidered cope pictured here, date back to the early 1900s.

The original St. James' Church, built in 1881, was on Alexander Street facing the water. By 1886, with the arrival of the CPR, plans were underway to move the small building, when it was destroyed in the city fire. A larger English country-style church was built on the present site—donated by the railway—to serve the Anglo-



Catholic congregation. This was followed by Father Clinton Memorial Parish Hall (1925), replacing an earlier hall, and the Clergy House on Cordova (1927), by Sharp & Thompson Architects. As early as 1904 Father Clinton expressed hope for a long-lasting church, stating “wooden buildings are not permanent.” Under

later leadership of Father Wilberforce Cooper, English architect Adrian Gilbert Scott met the challenge of setting a new church between the Parish Hall and the Clergy House. Completed in 1936, its 14th century Gothic style was expressed in modern materials as one the first buildings in Vancouver to feature cast exposed concrete.

St. James' Anglican Church located on the northeast corner of Gore Avenue and Cordova Street was completed in 1936.



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