

## The Chancel Mosaics – A Meander through Art, Industrial History, Sociology and Local History.

### The Technique

These panels are not made from the normal type of mosaics but instead are examples of a technique called **Opus Sectile**.

Ordinary mosaics are made from small pieces (tesserae) of clay or glass which are all the same size and shape (usually square). **Opus Sectile** is made from much larger pieces whose shape is determined by the pattern which is being made.

Look at the detail of the Baptism panel. The sky is true mosaic but the figures of Jesus and John the Baptist and the details of the landscape are made of much larger pieces of material – the opus sectile. In many ways the technique of making mosaics using opus sectile is like that of making stained glass windows because once the large pieces of opus are produced and placed in the design details are painted on them to give a much more realistic picture. Notice the faces of Jesus and John, the folds in the fabric of their clothes and the details of the landscape.



**Opus sectile** was known in the ancient Roman and Byzantine medieval world but it was rediscovered and brought to a very high art by one firm – **James Powell and Sons** who first started experimenting with the technique in the 1850s. This is the firm which made our mosaics and is in fact the only manufacturer of such work.

**Powell and Sons** had started in 1834 when James Powell, a City wine merchant bought a small glassworks called Whitefriars glass to provide a business to occupy his 3 sons. Whitefriars Glass was originally a simple glassblowing firm, making colourless flint glass for bottles, drinking glasses etc and was just one of many London glass manufactories. However the Powell brothers quickly expanded the business to include making **stained glass**, using medieval recipes for the colouring material. Their glass became so good that this side of the business expanded rapidly and Powells became one of the **pre-eminent Victorian stained glass manufacturers**, using designs by **William Morris, Henry Holiday and Charles Hardgrave**.

Colourless flint glass is made by heating sand, flint and an alkali to a high temperature in clay crucibles. **Opus sectile** (known in the company simply as “opus”) was developed by Powells as an economical way of using up waste glass and is not only very beautiful, but also the ultimate form of recycling! In 1888 Harry Powell wrote: “At least half the contents of every crucible [of colourless flint glass] were wasted in one way or another. The waste glass was sorted into four categories:-

- the best was just mixed with more raw materials and reheated
- the second best, which had a greenish tinge because it was tainted with iron scales from the blowing iron, was mixed with manganese which removed this colour and reheated
- The third [too heavily coloured to be decolourised with manganese had various metal oxides added] and was used for stained glass
- **The lowest type [of flint and coloured glass] contaminated with clay [from the floor and broken pot ] was ground up, and partially melted in a kiln to form opus sectile which has an eggshell surface with an almost unlimited range of colours”.**

Opus sectile was described as “standing halfway between tile painting and stained glass” and the derivation from stained glass can be seen in this early piece from 1865 which has a limited range of rather muddy colours and the pieces of opus are separated by cement – rather as pieces of stained glass are separated by lead.



By the late 1890s when our mosaics were made the colours were clear, delicate and bright and the pieces of opus fitted together almost seamlessly.



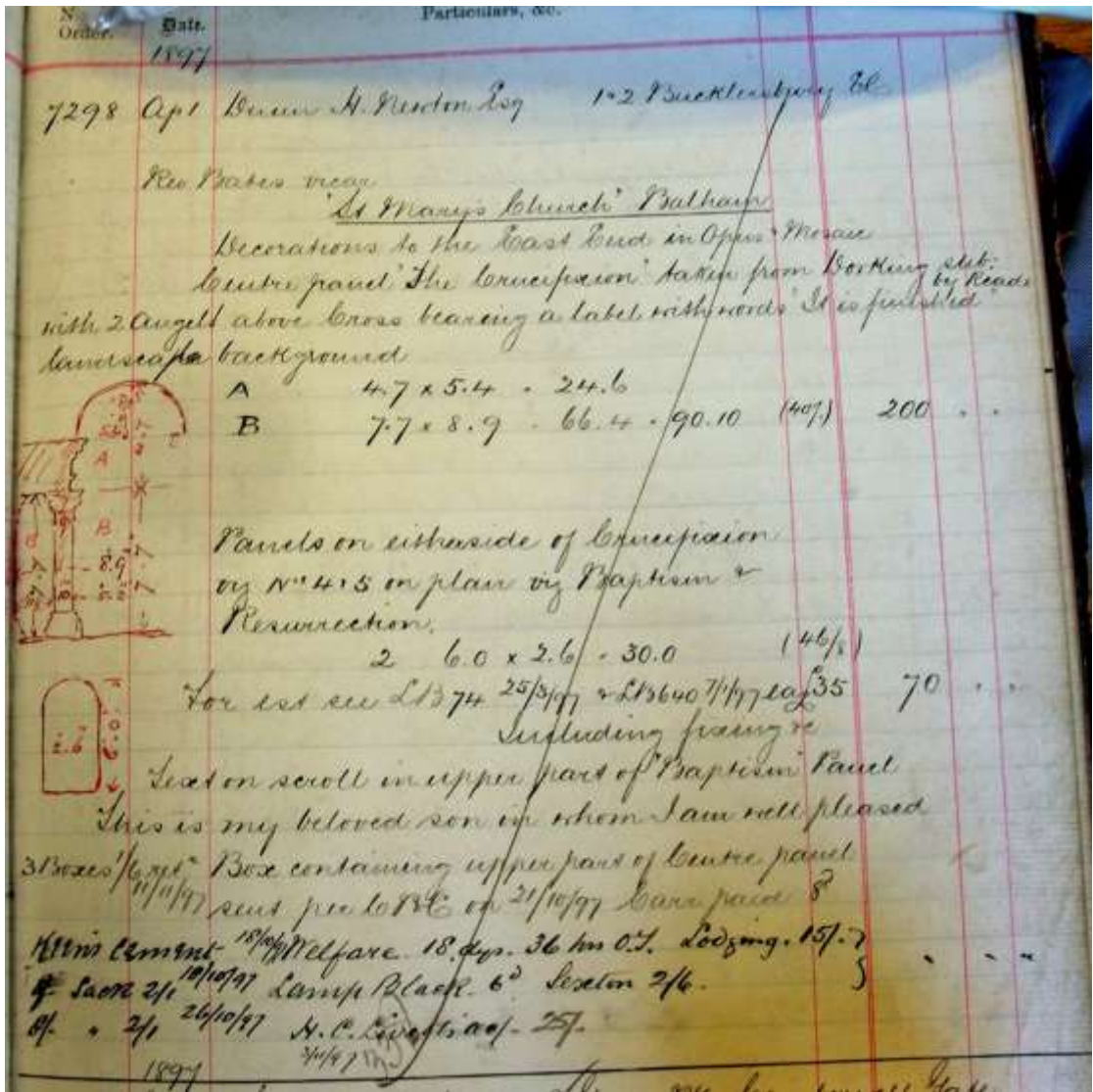
Multiply all sums of money by  
100 for a rough modern  
equivalent

### When were our mosaics made?

The first set was ordered in April 1897 and delivered in October 1897. It consisted of The Crucifixion and its 2 flanking panels, the Baptism of Christ and the Resurrection of Christ.

The central panel cost £200 and the other 2 were each £35, inclusive of carriage and fixing.

Powells charged opus work by the square foot so the prices reflect the much larger size of the Crucifixion.



In January 1898 the two panels furthest to the left (The Annunciation and the Nativity) were ordered and in March 1898 The Presentation in the Temple, Christ Meeting Mary, Christ's Charge to Peter and The Descent of the Holy Ghost. The first 3 of these panels were installed in June 1898 and a photograph in the archives shows them in place but without the last three panels which were installed in October 1898.

No. of Order.	Date.	Particulars, &c.	Rate.	AMOUNT.
	1898			
7646	Jan	Burn N.H. Newton 122 Bucklebury Res. J. Bates. Vicar <u>St Mary's Church, Baltham</u> To supply 2 panels of Opus Subjects 1 The Annunciation 2 The Nativity to go in first 2 spaces of East Wall 2 6.0 x 2.6 For est see L <sup>ts</sup> 74 25/3/97 ea £35		70
Mar 23 May 2		Supply 1 panel of Opus subject: The Presentation for space between Baptism & Nativity panels Christ melting man's heart 2 6.0 x 2.6 Receipt of the Holy Ghost		70
		June 6 <sup>th</sup> Welfare fixing 2 panels to dip. est. m. Lodging 5/6 at Builders' of Smith's Coleridge 27 Smith's 5 dips 5 hrs. Builders 5/6 Life 15/6 Faxes 3/8 ex 32		

7847	July	Burn N.H. Newton 127 Bucklebury Res. J. Bates Vicar <u>St Mary's Ch Baltham</u> Supply 2 panels of Opus to complete, N <sup>o</sup> 6 & 8 in pt Subjects Noli me tangere Descent of the Holy Ghost 2 6.0 x 2.6 For est see L <sup>ts</sup> 74 25/3/97 ea £35		70
		Fixing included		
	July 1	Carstairer for G.H.M. 2/6 - Panels fixed		
	Oct 10 <sup>th</sup>	Welfare 10 dips 18 hrs. Faxes 6/8 Builders 8/6 Sexton 2/6 - Assistance & Blacksmith 2/6		

48

Multiply all sums of money by  
100 for a rough modern  
equivalent

## Who were the people who worked on the Mosaics?

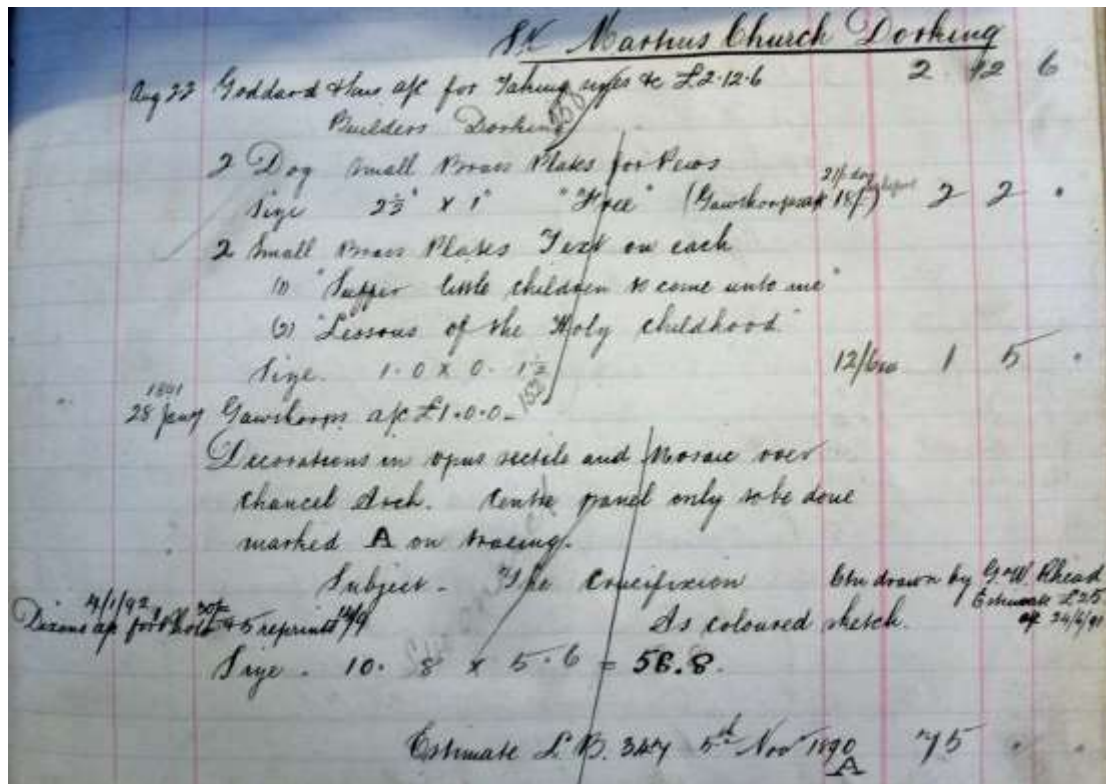
Making the mosaics involved a variety of different steps.

### *The designers*

The designers drew the cartoon (the basic design) for a commission. They worked in the Studio for 45 hours per week and in 1898 were paid between £2-5s-0d and £5 a week. A young man still learning the trade was paid £1-9s-0p a week

The top designer in-house was Charles Hardgrave who later established his own design firm and but other well-known designers were A F Coakes and E Penwarden.. Henry Holiday who left in the early 1880s to found his own very successful practice collaborated with Powells supplying opus designs which they made up for him. Powells also used free-lance artists as designers, paying for the cartoons on a one-off basis.

We do not really know who actually designed our mosaic panels since this is not generally recorded in the Window Department Order Books. It also seems that Powells tended to show clients designs that they had done in the past and then adapt them to the client's whim and/or the different size and shape of the space to be filled. But the first extract above from the Glass Order Book for the Crucifixion panel does state that it is "Taken from Dorking Sub[ject] by Reade ". The "Reade" referred to here is **G[eorge] W[olliscroft] Rhead** who designed the 1891 Crucifixion for St Martin's church in Dorking , and was taught by Ford Maddox Brown (The Pre-Raphaelite artist and grandfather of Ford Maddox Ford ,the author of "Parade's End"). As a freelance artist Rhead received £25 for drawing the Dorking cartoon. Born in Stoke-on-Trent, the son of a painter of pottery, in 1911 Rhead was a 56 year old widower, living in Downe Lodge, Oxford Road, Putney with his son (an art teacher) and daughter (an embroiderer for the Royal School of Needlework). He exhibited at the Royal Academy , wrote an influential book "Modern Practical Design" based on the on Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau movements and taught at Putney School of Art from 1896 onwards..



Rhead's Dorking Crucifixion originally contained only the figures of Christ, Mary and John against a plain cement background, but a mosaic background of the sun, the moon and stars was added later. This is why the order for **our** Crucifixion mosaic actually specifies that we want a landscape background and the two angels above the cross.

At least one of the designers in the Studio might well have known and attended St Mary's church; in 1911 the 40 year old Henry James Strutt, who described himself as a stained glass draughtsman, lived at 82 Cathles Road in Balham with his wife, daughter and aunt. At that time he was earning £2-14s-0d a week.

### **The painters**

The painters took the cartoon and painted the actual design on the opus before it received its final firing but speaking in 1893 to Charles Booth (of the Poverty Map and The Inquiry into Life and Labour in London) Arthur Powell noted that "sometimes painters and designers shift from one branch into another", the context implying that this depended on the work in hand.

Like the designers the painters worked a 45 hour week but were paid a lower rate from £1-14s-0d to £3-10s-0d a week.

Powells did employ a few women painters but they only worked a 35 hour week and received 1s-3d an hour making their weekly wage £2-3s-9d.

Powells did not have an apprenticeship scheme, but employed boys from 13 or 14 upwards and they learnt on the job, starting at a weekly wage of 6s-0d but rising to full rates after about 7 to 10 years.

## ***The Mosaicists***

After the individual pieces of opus and mosaic had been fired and painted, the mosaicists assembled them into the finished design. This was skilled artisan work and they were paid from £1-1s-0d to £1-18s-0d per week; Frederick Duffield the foreman of the opus workshop received £2-2s-6d a week. Born in Essex, in 1901 he was 45 and lived at 72 Casella Road, Deptford with his wife, a son who was a commercial clerk and a daughter who was a dressmaker's apprentice.

Alfred Welfare who spent 18 days and 36 hours fixing the first set of mosaics, then 6 days 14 hours and 10 days and 18 hours for the second and third set was paid £1-18s-0d a week. In 1901 he was 50 years old and lived with his wife, 2 daughters and a son at 289 Queens Road, West Ham. But his wife was born in Brixton and he must have lived there early in his marriage because all 3 of his children were born there.

The mosaicists seemed proud of their part in a very specialised art form and recorded their occupation as "mosaicist" or "mosaic worker" in all censuses.

In general the workforce was very loyal to Powells, staying with them for many years – hardly surprising since they were at the top end of the trade and had a paternalistic attitude towards their workforce. The latter may reflect their strong Christian principles. The notebook that James Croft Powell took on his Continental travels shows various notes on theology as well comments on artistic trends, drafts of agreements with designers and his expenses for the trip. Arthur Powell was for many years the churchwarden of St Martin's church, Dorking which has numerous examples of opus sectile work.

<p><b>Multiply all sums of money by 100 for a rough modern equivalent</b></p>
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## **Who paid for the chancel mosaics?**

Altogether the mosaics cost £480 – equivalent to over £48,000 in today's money.

All of them were ordered from Powells by **William Newton Dunn**; the inscriptions below the panels record that he personally paid for one of them but in all other cases he acted as the agent for the vicar, Thomas Bates, and the donors.

It is not clear who paid for the Crucifixion – perhaps the much larger cost was raised by general subscription, but the smaller panels were usually given by a single donor, often in memory of a dead relative.

## **William Newton Dunn and Susannah Dunn ("Christ Meeting Mary")**

William was an architect and although he did not design the chancel he was responsible for the later changes to the front elevation of the building.

He had a successful practice in the City at 1 and 2 Bucklersbury and presumably dealt with Powells because he already knew them through his work. He was born in Mitcham in 1849 and in 1879 married Susannah Morton, who was born in Broome, Worcestershire, AS a 22 year old in 1871 he was already established as an architect and surveyor and lived in Wandsworth with his maternal grandfather who had income from land, house and securities but after his marriage he set up house in 23 Lower Tulse Hill, Norwood (1881 census), moving to Beckenham by the 1891 census and Reigate by 1911.

His practice was clearly lucrative; in 1891 his household consisted of a cook, butler, housemaid and 4 general servants as well as his wife and a son and daughter. When he died in 1914 his estate was worth £108,223-2s-0d.

### **Margaret E Palmer (“the Annunciation” and “The Nativity”)**

Margaret was unmarried and like her brother, Colonel Frederick Palmer whom these 2 panels commemorates, was born in Madras, India.

Frederick who also never married was a Lt Colonel in the Scots Guards and a JP; in 1881 and 1891 he and Margaret were living in Liston Hall on the Suffolk-Essex border with a staff of a ladies maid, cook, footman, groom 2 housemaids, and a kitchen maid.

### **Joseph Price (“The Presentation in the Temple”)**

Joseph was born in 1834 in Newport, Monmouth and in 1891 was living in “Hamilton” (presumably Hamilton House which is now better known to Balham residents as The Polish Club), Balham High Road. His household consisted of his wife, Frances Maria Price, whom this panel commemorates, two daughters, a ladies maid, cook, housemaid, parlour maid and kitchen maid. The name of his house seems to have reflected memories of a sojourn in Canada, since both his two daughters were born in Hamilton, near Toronto. He was a Director in the Railway and Public companies. Frances Maria, his wife was born at Clifton in Bristol in 1842.

### **Walter Thomas Nash (“The Baptism of Christ”)**

Walter was born in Clapham in 1854 but he is a shadowy figure, only showing up on one, possibly two censuses, living with his father Edward R Nash and mother Caroline Amelia Nash (Nee Butterworth) in 1861 and 1871 in Brixton Road and Balham Road, respectively. He paid for the Baptism panel in memory of his mother, and his sister Ellen and brother Horace paid for the Holy Ghost panel in memory of their father (see below)

### **Ellen M Nash and Horace R Nash (“The Descent of the Holy Ghost”)**

Ellen Marianne and Horace Richard were born in Brixton in 1850 and 1869, respectively. Ellen never married but after her father’s death she moved to live in Aldrington, Sussex with her widowed sister and her family. In 1901 Ellen’s 18 year old niece Henrietta Dalziel gave her profession as “actress” – somewhat daring for a middle-class family!

Horace was an insurance agent; in 1901 he was living in Croydon with his wife, 3 daughters and small son and one general live-in servant.

Edward R Nash who is commemorated by this panel seems to have been adaptable and relatively prosperous. Born in the City (Aldersgate) he was successively a wholesale tea dealer in St James Place, Clapham (1851) and Brixton (1861), then an accountant living at Byrne Road in 1871 and 1 Leigham Terrace, Balham Hill, Streatham in 1881. By 1891 he was living “on his own means” at “Tintern”, Elmfield Road.

### **Henry (Harry) William Nightingale (“The Resurrection”)**

Henry gave this panel in memory of his father Walter Crittenden Nightingale and mother Elizabeth Rickerby. Walter Nightingale, born in Tooting Graveney, was a coachman in 1848 when he married Elizabeth, the daughter of a linen draper, but sometime between then and his death in 1873 at the relatively early age of 44 he had amassed a business as a job and post-master, operating a livery stable and hiring out horses and carriages. Elizabeth predeceased him by a few months.



In 1871 Henry was working as a clerk (possibly in his father's company) but in 1881 he was living in Clayton Terrace, Balham High Road and was also a job-master and an omnibus proprietor employing 20 men.

By then he had married (1878 in St Leonard's church, Streatham) Rosanna Ellen Ede a widow who was four years older than him. Rosanna was born Rosanna

Ravenscroft and was the daughter of Benton Ravenscroft of 3 Serle Street London, maker of legal wigs. Her first marriage to Joseph Webb Ede, robe maker, of 94 Chancery Lane ended with his death aged 26 after only 6 months of marriage.

Rosanna had no children by her first marriage but she is the first link in a chain which in 1902 led to the merging of the firms of Ede (robe makers) and Ravenscroft (law wig makers) to create the firm of **Ede and Ravenscroft** which now supplies academic gowns and all kinds of ceremonial robes, including those for Coronations.

Henry Nightingale ran the livery stable for some years; in 1891 he was living at Oxford Villa, Balham High Road but in 1901 aged 49 he had already retired from the livery stable and was living at 14 Grove Road. By 1911 he had moved away from Balham to a house called "Ravenscroft" (presumably to honour his wife's maiden name) in Parkside Wimbledon and was a bank director. Henry and Rosanna had no children.

### **The Schoolchildren ("Christ's Charge to Peter")**

This panel was a collective donation from "the schoolchildren" – presumably of what is now Trinity St Mary's Primary School.