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BENVGAH1 Architecture in Britain since the 17th Century

MA Architectural History

St John the Baptist by Sam Scorer: Liturgy and Social Narrative in the Anglican Church.

Section 1 (Introduction)

This paper will form an in depth study of Sam Scorer's Church of St John on the Ermine Estate, Lincoln (Fig. 1). It will attempt to understand the extent to which this building is a product of the Liturgical Movement, in turn revealing the impact of the movement on Anglican church design in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, efforts will be made to understand the social implications of the Liturgical Movement and the realisation of Scorer's design on the existing congregation and residents of the Ermine Estate.

Key works by relevant experts and academics on the subject include architectural historian, Elain Harwood's work for *Historic England* and the *Twentieth Century Society* including, *Space, Hope and Brutalism: English Architecture 1945-1975*; *England's Post-War Listed Buildings*; and *The Twentieth Century Church*.

The leading writer on Scorer, Karolina Szynalska's *Sam Scorer: A lesser known architect of the twentieth century*; *The Markham Moor Papilio: A picturesque commentary*; and a text on the Church of St John itself, *Yesterday's church of tomorrow: St. John the Baptist, Ermine Estate*.



Fig. 1 View of the entrance to the Church of St John on the Ermine Estate.

Peter Hammond's *Liturgy and Architecture*, thought to be '[...] one of the most important books for church design of the twentieth century [...]' (Proctor, 2016).

Geographer, Dr Andrew Jackson's extensive efforts to uncover social histories within UK council estates, resulting in papers such as, *The history and heritage of Lincoln's council estates: local history and "critical" public history in practice*.

For *The Local Historian*, Jackson discusses the practice of research and writing on council estates:

'Studies of council housing in Lincoln draw partially and variably from what the long accumulation of thought and practice in local history has to offer. To date what has been published is generally at the 'place-focused' end of the spectrum of local history research, with a particular interest in the boundaries, lines, patterns, forms and structures that can be 'read' in the landscape, and the political, social, economic and cultural processes that explain their creation and passing away. These council estates invite further work, turning more towards the 'people-focused' approach which is associated with community history, enriched by the gathering together of *contemporary media sources, memorabilia, and oral testimony*.' (emphasis added)

This paper too must engage the lives of the community on the Ermine Estate, in line with liturgical thinking at the time, whereby '[...] the Church itself is the people, not bricks and stones' (Hodgkinson, 1959),

so research will be conducted according to Jackson's statement, utilising *contemporary media sources* (websites, archives and libraries), *memorabilia* (the Church of St John community archive) and *oral testimony* (interviews with the current vicar of the church, members of the congregation, residents of the Ermine Estate and some of the aforementioned experts and academics on the subject).

Following this introduction, the paper will be structured into a number of short sections.

Section 2 (*The Liturgical Movement and the Anglican Church*) will present an overview of the movements growth in the UK in order to convey the key aims of the Anglican church up until Scorer's involvement at Ermine and to contextualise later discussion within the essay.

Section 3 (*The Ermine Estate*) provides a description of the character of the Ermine Estate.

Section 4 (*Appointing the Architect*) outlines Scorer's first encounter with Fr John Hodgkinson and provides a brief account on the architect himself.

Section 5 (*'Advanced Liturgical Thinking'*) will analyse the effects of the Liturgical Movement on Scorer's design and will attempt to understand why the church may be considered 'advanced' in this respect.

Section 6 (*East Window*) will form a detailed account of the East Window at St John, designed by the artist, Keith New.

Section 7 (*Hyperbolic Paraboloid*) will examine Scorer's shell roof, a key feature of the church's design, which played an integral role in raising funds for the scheme.

Section 8 (*'Do-It-Yourself' and Pay For It*) will use the church's community archive, particularly copies of the *Lincolnshire Echo* and the *Ermine News*, relatively neglected sources of information, to uncover a narrative surrounding the realisation of the project, including initial reactions to the building from the congregation and residents of the Ermine Estate.

Section 2 (*The Liturgical Movement and the Anglican Church*)

Originating in France during the 1830s and 1840s, then later developing across northern Europe and the United States in the 1900s '[...] as a popular reform of Christian worship [...]' (Harwood, 2015), the Liturgical Movement's aims were evangelical, '[...] to bring the congregation closer to each other as well as to God.' (Harwood, 2015)

Key texts are Fr A G Herbert's *Liturgy and Society* in 1935 and Dom Gregory Dix's *The Shape of the Liturgy* 1945, which reinforced the need for liturgical reform, but it was not felt in England until after the war and it wasn't until 1957 that the excitement of '[...] the Liturgical Movement reached the British architectural press.' (Harwood, 2015) In the same year, Peter Hammond, who had studied art before his ordination, criticised church architecture in *The Listener*, following it with a similar article in the *Architectural Review* and an integral book to liturgical thought, *Liturgy and Architecture*.

Hammond was concerned with function over aesthetics, seeking 'a church which reflects a new theological outlook, a deepened understanding of the liturgy which gives the building its *raison d'être*' (Hammond, 1958). Admiring the work of Gottfried Bohm and Rudolf Schwarz, he was interested in the potential of square, round, or elliptical plans that were '[...] beginning to be enjoyed by architects

designing theatres ‘in the round’ (Harwood, 2015). On the subject, Rudolf Wittkower states:

‘How could the relation of man to God be better expressed, we feel now justified in asking, than by building the house of God in accordance with the fundamental geometry of square and circle.’ (Wittkower, 1949)



Fig. 2 Physical model of the Smithson's Coventry Cathedral competition entry.

The Architectural Association lecturer supported the concept of liturgical reform, sharing Hammond's interest in the potential of a strong geometry when it came to church design. Significantly, Peter Smithson was '[...] inspired by Wittkower's lectures in the late 1940s' (Harwood, 2015), evidenced by the Smithson's entry for the Coventry Cathedral competition, a vast diamond-shaped space featuring a forward altar and a remarkable *hyperbolic paraboloid* roof (Fig. 2).

Section 3 (*The Ermine Estate*)



Fig. 3 Red brick blocks of flats on the Ermine Estate.

Still one of Lincoln's largest council estates totalling around 1350 homes, split into East and West components by the existing Riseholme Road (part of the Roman 'Ermine Street'), the Ermine Estate formed the final phase of the local authority's housing construction for the period, mainly constructed between 1952 and 1958 (Harwood, 1999).



Fig. 4 View of the Vicarage with the Church of St John in the background.

Defined by a number of characteristic meandering streets, the majority of the estate is composed of low density red / yellow brick blocks of flats, two-storey houses, semi-detached or terraced, all with good sized front and back gardens that remain relatively well maintained to this day (Fig. 3, Fig. 4). There are also a number of examples of pre-fabricated houses, employed in an attempt to build quickly and address the extensive waiting list for housing during the period. (Unknown, 2015)

The estate became something of a showpiece in modernist housing for the city, with Adrian Jones referring to it as '[...] social housing as it was meant to be, and it has survived for fifty years, not pristine, but evidently a place that works.' (Adrian Jones, 2014)

Initially, the majority of residents moving to the estate were young couples who were simply, '[...] excited by the prospect of owning their

own home [...]’ (Liz Straw, 2018), but today the estate is home to a
‘[...] largely unemployed population [...]’ (Liz Straw, 2018) and is part
of a deprived Minster Ward, in the top 20% of the Multiple
Deprivation Index in England (Council, Undated).

Section 4 (*Appointing the Architect*)

‘St. John the Baptist was commissioned by Rev. John Hodgkinson over a cup of tea he shared one afternoon with Eric Scorer, a clerk to Lindsey County Council’ (Szynalska, 2011). Scorer showed the vicar an image of a contemporary church proposal for Welwyn Garden City, designed by his son, Sam Scorer. Scorer was a young, local architect who studied at the Architectural Association, the most progressive school in Britain at the time. (Szynalska, 2011)

Working as a practitioner in London for the early part of his career, Scorer later returned to Lincoln where his talent was much admired by his new boss, Denis Clarke Hall, a distinguished architect in the area. In 1954, Scorer was made a partner of the firm, only 5 years after graduating from the AA in 1949. Though still largely unrecognized, he would proceed to acquire Listed status for three of his design projects, an outstanding feat for any architect. One such project was his design for the Church of St John on the Ermine Estate, which is now Grade II* Listed.

Section 5 ('Advanced Liturgical Thinking')

In an early attempt to open discourse on the design of the Church of St John, a church that aimed to be '[...] functional, not historical', shortly before giving an illustrated talk to the congregation titled, '*How Modern should a Modern Church be?*' (Hodgkinson, 1959), Scorer arranged a meeting with Hodgkinson, from which the vicar made the following recollection:

'At one of our planning sessions Sam produced a blank piece of paper, and drew a small rectangle in the centre. He said that this represents the focal point of some activity, perhaps a speaker in Hyde Park. I was then asked to draw the way in which people would gather round to hear and see. ... This is basically the plan of St. John's Church.' Hodgkinson.

Referring to this early meeting between Scorer and Hodgkinson, current vicar Stephen Hoy explained how the exchange eventually informed a 'hexagonal solution to the question of the new liturgy' (Elain Harwood, 2015), including the final arrangement of the 'primitive' (Nikolaus Pevsner, 1989) concrete font, pulpit and alter (Fig. 5). He states that the former marks '[...] the geometric centre point for the hexagonal portion of the church in every direction' (Hoy, 2018), while the pulpit stands to the North and the alter offset to the East (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5 Physical model of Scorer's hexagonal plan for the Church of St John. The model was later sat on and subsequently destroyed by a member of the congregation.



Fig. 6 Cast concrete font marks the centre point for the church.

With the altar set to one side of the hexagonal Eucharistic space, St John at Ermine '[...]' was one of the first Anglican churches developed on a fan-shaped plan [...]' (Harwood, 1998). In a statement in support of an application to list the church, John F H Smith also recognised the significance of Scorer's decision to remove the altar from a central location, highlighting the drawback of the centrally planned church:

'[...] the celebrant has his back to a significant number of the congregation for most of the time. However, by offsetting the altar area to the East and limiting seating to the west, north and south, Scorer shows an early recognition of this weakness... It's (the church's) importance lies in its combining innovative architectural thinking with advanced liturgical planning.' (Smith, 1994)

This arrangement is a continuation from Scorer's earlier proposal for the contemporary church at Welwyn Garden City. Though never built due to budgetary reasons, the design was 'enthusiastically previewed in the *Architectural Review* and in Hammond's *Liturgy and Architecture*. Hammond suggests that the design at Welwyn Garden City '[...] promises to be one of the more interesting churches built in this country since the war.' (Hammond, 2011)

Section 6 (East Window)



Fig. 7 View from the interior of the Church of St John toward Keith New's East Window.

Above an article thanking the Italians for 'The Versatile Tomato', which then divulged a recipe for 'Tomato Surprise' from *Bette's Cookbook*, a 2003 issue of the *Lincolnshire Echo* featured a piece on the Church of St John as part of *Bette's Bygones*, a regular socio-historical column at the time. It provides an early quote from Hodgkinson expressing the initial concerns of doubting residents, then finally praising the positive influence of the new East window (Fig. 7):

'Many people were against the idea when building first started because the exterior didn't bear any resemblance to established traditions of church architecture. Many even thought it was going to be a theatre. One critic observed the sloping floor and asked when the new swimming pool was to be opened. Opinions started to change when Keith New's magnificent coloured glass was put into position.' (Vickers, 2003)



Fig. 8 Keith New observing a physical model of Scorer's church design for Welwyn Garden City.

Keith New appears to have first encountered Scorer in 1959, when the stained glass artist was pictured in the *Herts Advertiser* (Fig. 8) examining a physical model of Scorer's unrealised proposal for Welwyn Garden City (Diana Coulter, 2018). Scorer and New were to collaborate again in 1962 on an equally innovative church, on the Ermine Estate. From a budget of £24,000, Scorer earmarked £2000 'for some special art-work which would illuminate the whole

building.’ (Library, n.d.) This was to become New’s East window at the Church of St John, ‘[...] one of his boldest designs for this period [...]’ (Diana Coulter, 2018) and a ‘[...] turning point [...]’ (Kay, 1994) in his work.

New makes this comment on the East window ‘since he used very bright colours for the first time’ which was mainly ‘due to cost constraints.’ (Kay, 1994) He recognised early after being commissioned in 1959 that painted glass must be ‘ruled out on grounds of expense – it would have cost £15 per square foot. New’s response was to create a brilliant East window from coloured and flashed glass that wraps around three sides of the building and cost £5 per square foot.’ (Diana Coulter, 2018)

An abundance of flashed glass provides ‘[...] the widest possible range of tone [...]’ (Diana Coulter, 2018) and the resulting article is a bold, geometric design titled, *Revelation of God’s plan for Man’s Redemption*, which ‘[...] gives real vibrancy to the building [...]’ (Hoy, 2018). It was made with student help at the Royal College of Art, New’s old place of study where he had since become Head of Art & Design. Hoy elaborates, ‘On a sunny day, the Eucharistic space is flooded with colour, it’s lovely.’ (Hoy, 2018)

Previously, New was selected by the RCA's Rector, alongside two other artists to provide the nave windows at Coventry Cathedral on the request of the architect, Basil Spence. Each were assigned a theme and a colour by the architect, 'Keith guessed that he had been assigned the colour green, denoting beginnings, because, at 26, he was the youngest artist.' (Glasser, 2012) This job was to change New's life, which is perhaps why the colour '[...] green would remain important to him [...]' (Glasser, 2012) featuring prominently in the design for the East window at Ermine, which is still admired by the congregation to this day.

Section 7 (*Hyperbolic Paraboloid*)

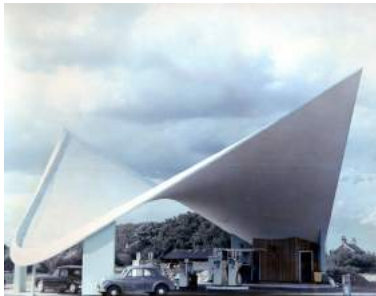


Fig. 9 Scorer's petrol station at Markham Moor.

Prior to the Church of St John, Scorer had demonstrated an increasing taste for the hyperbolic paraboloid. 'First used for foundry and manufacturing buildings for Alfa Romeo, in Milan, by Giorgio Baroni in 1934 and 1937 respectively' (Harwood, 1998), Scorer features the concrete hyperbolic paraboloid as part of a petrol station design at Markham Moor in 1960 (Fig. 9), and for the Lincolnshire Motor Company showrooms in 1961, a project that the flamboyant architect agreed to complete in exchange for a car.

In the UK, the hyperbolic paraboloid shell roof structure was first 'brought to church builder's attention by the Smithsons' Coventry Cathedral design in 1951, but became fashionable only in the late 1950s' (Harwood, 1998). This is partly the result of a government policy that operated between 1954 and 1963 whereby '[...] steel was only available through a rationing system [...]' (Anchor, 1945-1965).

Combined with the ongoing Liturgical Movement, this policy brought about '[...] an exceptionally inventive time for church architecture', (Harwood, 1998) whereby 'the hyperbolic paraboloid shell could be taken to symbolise or summarise the post-war excitements of engineering' (Boyd, 1958). Shell roof structures were duly employed

as a method of roofing, '[...] even over comparatively routine buildings' (Anchor, 1945-1965).

Originally a German invention, the first use of shell roof structures in the UK were '[...] simple barrel vaults constructed at Doncaster Airport (1936, demolished) and Wythenshawe Bus Garage (1939-42).' (Harwood, 1999) Among the first engineers to experiment with concrete shell construction in the UK, was Dr K Hajnal Konyi, a German refugee who arrived into London in 1936, before he '[...] advised on the hangar at Doncaster Airport.' (Harwood, 1999) He was an experienced specialist in shell techniques and soon set up his own firm which was aptly named, *Concrete Barrel Vault Roof Designs Limited*.



Fig. 10 View of the Church of St John from the South-East showing the undulating roof design.

The engineer worked on Scorer's earlier Listed projects at Markham Moor and the Brayford Pool and the two had a good relationship. Together, Konyi's expertise and Scorer's willingness to test the limits of hyperbolic paraboloid roof structures, the design team's intentions aligned perfectly with liturgical thinking at the time. Omitting all internal structure, the roof at St John (Fig. 10) created superior views for the congregation, '[...] reinforcing the immanentist approach to worship that the Liturgical Movement was encouraging' (Smith, 1994), in addition to signifying a clear departure from the Gothic Revival style.

Released with the tagline, '*Lincoln's Church of Tomorrow*' (Hoy, 2018), Scorer's unique roof design, '[...] so much talked about [...]' (Hodgkinson, 1962), acted as a beacon to attract attention locally and nationally, engaging the imagination of the public and press in a hope to draw funding. This was fundamental for the realisation of the church; in 1956 *The Incorporated Church Building Society* estimated '[...] that a new church cost an average of £31,450, a disturbingly large sum for a working-class parish to find [...]' (Harwood, 2015). In 1958, Hodgkinson and the Church of St John '[...] had absolutely no financial backing.' (Hoy, 2018)

Section 8 (*Do-It-Yourself. Pay for it too*)



Fig. 11 Copy of one resident's share certificate.

In 1958 an issue of the *Ermine News*, a monthly church newsletter edited by Fr John Hodgkinson, featured an article titled '8,000 Shares For Sale' (Hodgkinson, 1958). An early attempt to raise finances for construction of Scorer's church design, the article explains how the certificates (Fig. 11) provided in exchange for donations made for 'unusual souvenirs...signed by the Lord Bishop of Lincoln and they state that the owner has had a share in the building of the Parish Church.' (Hodgkinson, 1958)

To realise the project, Hodgkinson was utterly reliant on these types of appeals and on the generosity of others, both '[...] financially and otherwise' (LE, 1961), despite remarking as late as January 1959 that the appearance of the church '[...] is not known at this stage' (Hodgkinson, 1959).

One year later, Hodgkinson identified a shortfall of '£15,000 toward the new church [...]' (Hodgkinson, 1960), despite the receipt of £5,250 from the Diocese in the same month. So the vicar commenced a prolonged series of rallying cries to the local and national press, including this early declaration to the Lincolnshire Echo that identified the project, along with a number of other media outlets, as a 'Do-It-Yourself' operation due to the lack of funding:

‘The people of the Ermine housing estate, in the Stewardship Campaign held some time ago, proved that not only do they want their church but that they are prepared to support it financially and otherwise. So far they have had to be content with the two dual-purpose buildings – “a church when services are held, then down with the screens and on with the dance” (LE, 1961)

At the time this article was published, Hodgkinson claimed to have gathered only £17,000, which was still considerably lower than Scorer’s original estimate. He was fortunate then, that the congregation at Ermine were so willing to aid the scheme, because this really was fast becoming a do-it-yourself prospect. In light of the vast sums still required, the young vicar acknowledged, ‘[...] it is obvious that we must be prepared to do a considerable amount of the construction ourselves. We should, of course, use only skilled men for skilled work, but there are many of us prepared to work as labourers.’ (LE, 1961)

Promised payment by Hodgkinson upon completion of the scheme, Scorer agreed to provide further drawings and a physical model, to be used as marketing material to aid the funding campaign which eventually appeared in parish magazines, local and national newspapers, architectural journals, and on TV. The physical model was also exhibited at Coventry Cathedral before being ‘sat on and

subsequently destroyed by a member of the congregation' (Hoy, 2018),

Preparing to mark the beginning of construction by laying the foundation stone on July 23 1962 (Scorer, 1962), Canon Dalby increased pressure on the congregation in January, in the presence of the Mayor, Councilor E Herbert and an extended clergy from many other churches in the city, speaking of the difficult task before the congregation, 'They can, and will do it, not for their own glory, but to the glory of God, and because they know how much God loves them.' (LE, 1962)



Fig. 12 Pews made by the congregation and designed by Sam Scorer.

In July 1962, having now raised a total of £20,000 after much press coverage, an article in the Ermine News witnessed the signing of the contract for the first stage of building, which covered construction of the concrete shell of the church. The piece confessed that, unless large sums were received by the end of the year, the rest of the work will have to be carried out by the congregation, including '[...] laying of the floor, making the pews (Fig. 12), furniture and fittings, and decorating, as well as landscaping and planting the outside area.' (Hodgkinson, 1962)

MISSION URGE KE-OVER COURT



**18,000 RAIL
SHOPMEN TO
LOSE JOBS**

A maze of scaffolding and planks take on a shape that will soon be a familiar sight to residents on Ermine Estate, Lincoln. This is the latest stage in the progress of the new St. John's Church, and the shape of its roof can be seen in the picture.

Fig. 13 A 'maze' of scaffolding for the church's hyperbolic paraboloid roof appearing in the Lincolnshire Echo.

Shortly after, at a '[...] very vigorous eighty [...]' (Hodgkinson, 1962), Canon Dalby operated a bulldozer himself to begin clearance of the site before laying the foundation stone to represent '[...] the building up of a community on the estate' (LE, 1962). It didn't take long before 'a maze of scaffolding and planks [...]' (LE, 1962) quickly erupted on site for construction of the hyperbolic paraboloid roof (Fig. 13), '3 ½ miles' (LE, 1962) of it to be more precise, drawing some inquisitive residents to question, 'is it going to be a funfair ride?' (Hoy, 2018)

Despite setbacks by frost, with the aid of floodlights and oil burners the contractors '[...] continued work right into the night and, within a week...they completed the operation.' (LE, 1962) This day marked a further setback however, when negotiations for a £2000 loan for the walls of the church fell through 'because the charity concerned ... found that it must secure a mortgage, and it is not possible to mortgage a church.' (LE, 1962)

For Hodgkinson, more setbacks like this followed and it wasn't long before the church was forced to abandon the latter phase for the scheme completely due to a lack of funds, which had included the erection of a bell tower, estimated at an additional cost of £1000 according to a list of works in 1963. (Hodgkinson, 1963) However, abandoning the second phase of the scheme allowed the main structure of the church to be considered finished. In August 1963, 25



Fig. 14 The congregation appearing in the Ermine News after removing 30 tons of earth from the site.

male members of the congregation appeared at the entrance of the building at the request of the vicar '[...] to decorate, make cupboards, complete the site works and many other jobs to be ready for Consecration Day, October 6th.' (Hodgkinson, 1963)

On Tuesday's and Thursday's, the main work nights, women and children were also requested on site, 'Apart from providing cups of tea, there is needlework to be done [...]' (Hodgkinson, 1963). In three of these evenings, along with the help of Rev. Frank Baker, volunteers from the congregation removed '[...] thirty tons of earth with shovel and wheel-barrow [...]' (Hodgkinson, 1963), a mark of their dedication (Fig. 14).



Fig. 15 The congregation enjoying their completed church.

In 1963, one month after consecration of the Church of St John, Hodgkinson recalled some of the initial reactions of the congregation and residents of the Ermine Estate. Hundreds of men and women made remarks like, "I must confess that I didn't think much to it when it was going up, but the result is terrific" (Fig. 15); the elderly retracted their earlier qualms that there could be no 'atmosphere' in a modern church; a local police sergeant '[...] stopped in amazement [...]' when he looked inside, declaring 'I've watched it being built, and I wondered what all the fuss was about, but I can see now. It's beautiful'; teenagers beckoned their friends, 'It's a smashing church, come and have a look'; a builder observed out of professional

curiosity, 'I don't go to church, but if I did, I'd come to this one'.

(Hodgkinson, 1963)

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Archives

The Church of St John's Archive

Lincoln City Archives

RIBA Library Photographic Archive

Historic England Archive

Interviewee's

Fr Stephen Hoy

Karolina Szynalska

Liz Straw (Member of the congregation and Ermine Estate resident)

Jackie Howell (Member of the congregation and Ermine Estate resident)

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