

ENGLISH HERITAGE REVIEW OF CHURCHES IN DIOCESE 2005 (EXTRACT)

St Thomas More, Patcham, Brighton

Braybon Avenue, Patcham, Brighton, East Sussex



HISTORIC IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH

ARCHITECT(S) & DATE(S): Bingham Towner & Partners in association with David Ashdown. Simon Woolf Consulting Engineer for geodesic dome. 1963

LISTED STATUS: Not listed

IN CONSERVATION AREA: No

LIST DESCRIPTION: N/A

POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS/ADDITIONS TO LIST DESCRIPTION AND/OR
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: N/A

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF CHURCH IF NOT LISTED:

Built to cope with the northward Post War expansion of Brighton. The building sits low on the hillside and has little townscape presence. This is partly due to the refusal of planning permission for a bell tower as the church stands next to the Anglican church of Christ the King. To endeavour to compensate and to 'announce' the church, a stainless steel cross was added in 1991. The church building is modern in style. The main body of the church is square on plan with a timber geodesic dome on a concrete frame. It rises from four corners, so forming full-width elliptical clerestory windows with structural mullions supporting laminated timber arches. There was a client requirement that there should be a prominent roof feature over the central area, perhaps because the planning authority had advised against a tower. The church is designed on a six-foot grid, expressed in the flat roof internally. The dome is faceted and each facet covers one 6ft square. The construction of the dome was executed in-situ. The dome was clad in copper but this has been replaced with proprietary sheeting that has not improved the appearance. The dome itself was constructed by four men over a period of about seven months. The lowest tender for the dome structure itself was £4,400, which led to a decision to use direct labour to achieve savings. The geodesic dome was the invention of the American architect Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983). 'The geodesic dome is the lightest, strongest, and most cost-effective structure ever devised. It is able to cover more space without internal supports than any other enclosure. It becomes proportionally lighter and stronger the larger it is. The geodesic dome is a breakthrough in shelter, not only in cost-effectiveness, but in ease of construction. In 1957, a geodesic dome auditorium in Honolulu was put up so quickly that 22 hours after the parts were delivered, a full house was comfortably seated inside enjoying a concert.' Buckminster Fuller website www.bfi.org

To the west there is a generous entrance area with full-height glazing looking onto an enclosed forecourt, whilst church hall, sacristy etc are attached to the south. Internally the dome is supported on latticework joinery (Beves of Shoreham joiners) that sits broodingly over the worship area. The altar, ambo, font and consecration crosses date from a re-ordering c1982, linked through the use of green slate. The stations of the cross are painted on tiles and were originally fixed to the walls but have subsequently been placed in wooden frames. The light fittings and corona date from c1998 and were designed by a Blacksmith from the New Forest. Statue of St Thomas More by Arthur J J Ayers. Statue of Our Lady by Pacicci in cast concrete but later given a textured paint finish. On the north side the land falls away enabling a sunken baptistery with *dalles de verre* coloured glass in the window.

SOURCES

Parish priest

Interbuild January 1967, pp12-19

STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE

An interesting 'modern' church building with a pleasant and functional feel. It would be interesting to know more about the architect David Ashdown and his

relationship to Henry Bingham Towner. Towner himself designed conventional simplified Gothic buildings but by the 1960s there may have been others in the practice. Much of the churches interest derives from the geodesic dome, the work of the consulting engineer Simon Woolf. Not likely to be listable against the current stringent criteria for the listing of Post War buildings but one of the more interesting 1960s churches in the diocese.

