

History of St. Augustine's Catholic Church, Datchet



Datchet is the southernmost parish in the diocese. A mission was endowed and land given for a church and presbytery by Alfred Thomas Townshend Verney-Cave, a Catholic convert and the fifth Baron Braye, who had previously built the church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Eton (qv). On 12 January 1924 The Tablet reported on 'a small, temporary chapel, dedicated to St Augustine, which has lately been opened by the Canons Regular of the Lateran'. The Canons Regular also served the Eton church. This temporary chapel was replaced by the present building in 1928. 'Although small', The Tablet reported on 22 December 1928, 'the structure is pleasing in design and contains a fine marble altar which was formerly in the chapel of Stanford Hall, near Rugby' (Stanford Hall was the ancestral home of the Cave family, where Lord Braye had built, and then taken down, a private chapel). There are visual similarities with the church at Eton, designed by Lord Braye, although the death of the donor earlier in 1928 after a protracted illness does not suggest a major involvement; perhaps he sketched out a plan for the facade, for the rest of the building is externally very plain. Lord Braye left in trust the sum of £500 towards the heating and upkeep of the churches at Eton and Datchet (The Tablet, 22 September 1928). Eton House, the large building beside the church, used to be the presbytery but was sold in the 1980s and is now a care home. A small former school building to the northeast of the house became a new presbytery and parish hall.

Description

This small church has a tall, classical façade, almost like a piece of stage scenery, with quoins, prominent keystones, and an open segmental pedimented entrance. The frontage is plastered and painted white, the quoins and window dressings in contrasting yellow. Above the door, high in the wall, is a circular window. Behind the rather elaborate and tall façade, the main body of the church is a simple rectangular block with a hipped roof and keystones over the windows. At the east end is another screen wall, lower than that on the front, and with a small apse. Flat-roofed projections to either side of the church house the sacristy (north) and a small side chapel (south). Regrettably the timber windows in the church have been replaced in uPVC. The interior is intimate, the timber finishes providing a character of warmth. The plan consists of a nave with a small west gallery, sanctuary, side chapel and sacristy. The nave and sanctuary have a timber boarded barrel vaulted ceiling, and the walls are painted and plastered. The pews and gallery front are in matching, good quality woodwork. The central portion of the gallery front is curved. The underside of the gallery is enclosed with a panelled screen to provide a small narthex, with narrow stairs to the gallery. An octagonal stone font is now placed near the sanctuary. The sanctuary has solid panelled marble altar 'rails' (more like cancellae), and a marble sarcophagus altar, brought forward but presumably one and the same as that described above. The apse is top-lit. There is a further marble altar and wooden chairs in the side chapel.