

THE KELHAM ALTAR CROSS AND CANDLESTICKS

By Mary Somerville October 2018



The Kelham Altar Cross and Candlesticks were made by Alexander Fisher (1864 -1936) who was a silversmith and a leading artist working with enamels. He taught at the London County Council Central School of Arts and Crafts from 1896-1898 and later at other London Schools. He had his own workshop and he also had several private pupils. In the spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement, he advocated that every artwork should express a particular idea and should be designed and worked through all its stages by one person. Examples of his work can be seen in The Victoria and Albert Museum and in museums in Boston USA.

In the 1920s in order to cater for an increase in theological students, The Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham Hall planned to build a new chapel to replace the entrance court originally designed by Gilbert Scott. The innovatory new design fell to Charles Clayton Thompson and it was furnished with work from amongst others, the Artificer's Guild, Edward Spencer and Alexander Fisher.

In 1928 Fisher created a number of pieces including the altar cross and candlesticks, three sanctuary lamps and two free standing 'great candlesticks' which were a gift to the chapel from past students. The altar cross and candlesticks are made of silver plate. The cross has a centrally enamelled scene of the Ascension and the Candlesticks have blue enamelled spheres below the candle holder. The free standing 'great candlesticks' are made of stained oak and silver plate. Their silver plated hexagonal capitols are repoussé with a panelled frieze of trailing curlicues of ivy. The faceted column supports each with three riveted plain silvered plaques are inset into circular spreading panelled feet.



When Kelham Hall was sold in 1974 the altar cross and smaller candleholders and the two great candlesticks' were sold at auction to a private owner. In 1995, the then Provost, later dean, David Leaning was informed that the set was on the market again. He asked the Council of the Friends of Southwell Minster to purchase the set for the Minster. This they did for £7,500. They were unable to buy two 'great candlesticks' as they could not afford them. The 'great

candlesticks' came onto the market again in May 1998 when they were sold at Christies for £12,650.00 .

The enamel work on the Kelham Candlesticks and Altar Cross are said to be of exceptional quality. So, you might want to give them a proper look if you have a few minutes to spare next time you are on duty!

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