

SAINT ANNE'S, SOHO

A Photo Essay

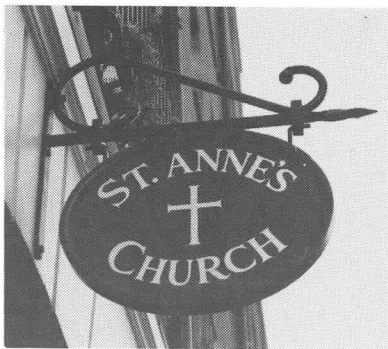
by **Paul M. Pearson**

When I first moved to live in London in the summer of 1985, I decided to spend some time taking a look at some of the London “sights” connected with Thomas Merton. I began with finding the church where Merton’s parents, Owen Merton and Ruth Jenkins, were married on 7 April 1914. I was disappointed to find that all of the church, except for its tower, had been destroyed by enemy action on the night of 24 September 1940. The tower alone remained. It contained a parish office and small meeting room set in the quiet grounds of what had formerly been the church. Though I was disappointed not to see the church, the gardens were a haven of quiet amidst the busy streets of the Soho area of London’s famous West End. The other sites connected with Merton’s time in London — his preparatory school, the house in Ealing, the Bennett’s flat, and the Middlesex Hospital where Owen died in 1931 — were not of much interest.

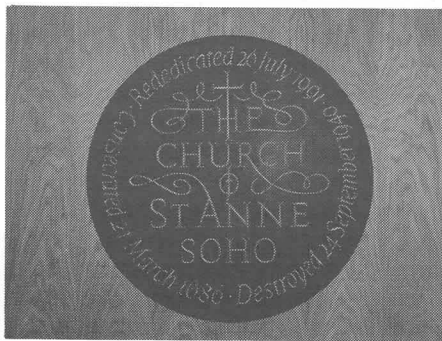
Last summer my interest in St. Anne’s, Soho, was once again stirred when an article in *The Church Times*, the Church of England’s weekly newspaper, told of the rebuilding of St. Anne’s around the tower and of its re-dedication on 26 July 1991 by the Bishop of Fulham, the Right Reverend John Klyberg. St. Anne’s was originally consecrated in 1688 and was attributed to Sir Christopher Wren, though its tower, the only part to survive the Second World War, was redesigned by S. P. Cockerell and rebuilt in 1803. The church has not been rebuilt to its former dimensions. Instead the site has been redeveloped around the tower to include a smaller church with various meeting rooms, an office and a kitchen, along with twenty flats for the Soho Housing Association, an exhibition room and some shopping space. The church is open at various times each day for daily prayers, a Eucharist, and quiet prayer. Since it was reopened I have visited it regularly and it provides a haven of peace and quiet in the heart of the busy West End.

Towards the end of 1930 and the beginning of 1931, Thomas Merton spent a great deal of time in the area of the West End, where St. Anne’s is situated, visiting bookshops, theatres, and cinemas. I doubt very much that Merton ever visited the church where his parents were married though at this time he was staying at the Bennett’s flat, while his father was dying in the Middlesex Hospital — both just a short walk from St. Anne’s. Like his faith, I expect, it lay at this stage undiscovered.

□ **Paul M. Pearson** lives at St. Peter’s Monastery in East Dulwich, London, England. He is a member of *The International Thomas Merton Society* and delivered a paper — “Merton and the Celtic Monastic Tradition: Search for the Promised Land” — at the Second General Meeting of the *ITMS* in 1991. The paper will appear in *The Merton Annual 5* (1992). A frequent reviewer of Merton books, his last contribution to *The Merton Seasonal* was “Journey to Sri Lanka and Three Poems” (Summer 1990).



The tower of St. Anne's, Soho, and the new development viewed from Wardour Street, London.



The slate plaque in the new church marking its rededication. The plaque was designed, cut and gilded by Lisa Lopez Cardozo of the David Kindersley Workshop in Cambridge, England.

1914. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church Soho in the Parish of St. Anne, Westminster in the County of London.

Colman.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
398.	April 7 th 1914.	Owen Merton Ruth Calvert Jenkins	27 27	Bachelor Spinster	Artist. —	9 Little Newport Street, Soho 29 Woburn Place, W.C.	Alfred Merton Samuel Jenkins	Musician Publisher.
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Church of England</u> by _____ or after <u>Rites</u> by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, <u>Owen Merton</u> <u>Ruth Calvert Jenkins</u>			In the Presence of us, <u>Judith Atkinson, D. S. Atkinson, B. C. Parra & S. Macgovern</u> <u>Guynn Merton, Miss M. Pearce.</u>		Officializing Ministers.			