

Malcolm Johnson
St. Martin-in-the-Fields
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My first recollection of St Martin's is of being taken there by my grandmother one Sunday afternoon when I was about ten years old. Hemmed in by the crowd in a gallery, I could see nothing of what was happening. Gradually I learnt more about this London landmark - that Queen Mary used to go there; of two successive incumbents who drew the crowds, Dick Sheppard (renowned at that time for his ministry among the poor and homeless) and Pat McCormack (the preacher whom I had heard but not seen and whose name became a household word in the early days of broadcasting). St Martin-in-the-Fields may be said to represent the Church of England at its best.

Malcolm Johnson, who has spent years in inner city ministry, latterly based at St. Martin's as the Bishop of London's Advisor on Pastoral Care, has written a comprehensive history of a place close to his heart. From its beginnings in the thirteenth century he tells the story of the church and parish. With detail and humour which bring the tale to life he tells of the buildings, never large enough before the present church designed by James Gibbs was begun in the 1720s, down to the exciting developments now taking place. He tells of incumbents frustrated but at the same time excited by the place (Sheppard was put off by the pulpit which set him almost as high above the people as was Nelson on his column outside) and of the people - not all admirable - associated with St. Martin's (from King George I as church warden, to the blind beggar who used to sit with his dog outside). He leaves us with a picture of a church which, after centuries of change, is not only a place of worship and prayer, but is 'in touch' with all sorts of people - the poor and homeless, the Chinese community, the world of music through the Academy of St Martin in the Fields - a 'church without walls'.

All this and much else we find in this attractively produced and well illustrated book, which should delight church historians and give heart to those who fear that in our urban society the church counts for little.

Reginald SSF