# St. Matthew's Church, Québec
## A distinctly British Neo-gothic style


Aerial view
Photo : François Brault

One of the main landmarks in the Saint-Jean-Baptiste quarter, a residential sector for francophone artisans since the 18th century, is the church and burial ground of St. Matthew. This was a Protestant site which was consecrated in the last quarter of the 18th century, and presented a non-Catholic enclave at the city gates. Like the Anglican Cathedral, it stands witness to the 'peaceful' religious confrontation between the conquerors and the conquered, during the first years following the Paris treaty. A very British neo-gothic style was chosen for the present church. This stands out against the gothic eclecticism which characterises most of the buildings in the Montréal area. (see Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, and Notre-Dame-de-Montréal).


Interior since becoming a library
Photo : François Brault

**The first place of worship - the gravedigger's house**

The site was for a long time limited to the burial of Protestants. From 1822, with the increasing French-speaking Protestant community from the Channel Isles, services started to be held in French in the gravedigger's house adjoining the burial ground. At first these services were held once a month with the vicar from the Anglican Cathedral presiding. In 1827, this house was modified and became a permanent chapel where services were held in English in the evening. A fire in 1845 destroyed the building and it was replaced by a wooden chapel a few years later.


Choir
Photo : François Brault

**A new church fulfilling the ambition of the growing Anglican community**

The first project to rebuild the structure was supervised by John Cliff in 1848. The setting up of the parish of St. Matthew and the arrival of a permanent minister in 1855 show the importance of the growing community. The building soon became too small for the community's needs and was extended in 1870. Under William Tutin Thomas' supervision the wall of the choir was destroyed in order to add a transept and a five-sided chevet. The nave was also lengthened and a side aisle was added.

The bell-tower-porch was built on to the façade in 1882, and gave the building the appearance we know today. The only other structural change took place in 1890 when the polygonal choir was replaced with the more spacious, flat chevet it has today.

The church was deconsecrated for a change of use in 1979-1980 and became a library. This change allowed the building to be kept intact and also to keep a calm atmosphere favourable to recollection.

**Typically English characteristics**

As the church was built in a French-speaking Catholic town it is easy to understand why the Protestant community wished to use a design which reminded them of their mother country. This had also been the case when the Anglican Cathedral was built at the turn of the 18th century. Paradoxically, the English churches which served to provide a neo-gothic model for the Protestant builders in Canada were built in England before the Reformation when they were used for Catholic worship.

Typical English features can be seen both outside and inside the church. The bell-tower with its impressive slender steeple calls to mind the architecture of the 13th century such as Salisbury Cathedral. It totally dominates the small bell-gable which is also inspired by the British style. The rough stonework, for its part, is reminiscent of Medieval English parish churches.

Inside, the exposed beams resting on corbels does not emphasise the bay layout of the building. This, again, is typically British. The fact that Cliff and Thomas were trying to reproduce English designs is particularly evident in the rounded mouldings of the large arcades, the presence of horizontal bands on the twin columns in the nave, the choir with a flat chevet, and the magnificent rood screen.

**Charles Bourget**
Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

Bibliography:

- Mendel, David. « Église St. Matthew et cimetière protestant », *Les chemins de la mémoire*, t. I, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1990, p. 202-203.
- Mendel, David. « Un écrin médiéval, l'église St. Matthew », *Cap-aux-Diamants*, vol. 3, no 1 (printemps 1987), p. 49-52.

**Katia Tremblay**

Bibliographie:

-