

THE CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION. AN UNEXPECTED TOKEN OF SACRED ARCHITECTURE IN BUCHAREST

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Abstract: In the centre of Bucharest, there is a building that stands out from the rest due to its Neo-Gothic style. It is known as the 'Anglican Church', one of the few places of worship in Eastern and Central Europe built in the Victorian Neo-Gothic style. It was listed on the list of historical monuments in the city of Bucharest in 1965. This church is part of the Continental division of the Church of England. Its priests are the representatives of the archbishop of Canterbury in London. The presence of the Church of England in Romania is linked to the intertwined history of the Royal Houses of Romania, and Britain.

Keywords: The Church of England of Bucharest, heritage building, cultural heritage, the British Royal House, the Romanian Royal House

In the center of Bucharest, in a small green parcel surrounded by interwar Art-Deco buildings, a special edifice, stands out and attracts the eye with its Victorian Neo-Gothic architecture: the 'Anglican' Church, the only place of worship of its denomination in this part of Eastern Europe, a historical and architectural monument, which starting with 1965 has been included in the list of A-class historical monuments [1] in Bucharest, with the dedication, „Church of the Resurrection” – Anglican (B- II-m-A-19833) [2]. This belongs to the Diocese of Europe and is subordinate to the Archdeacon of Central Europe, based in Vienna. The priests who officiate the liturgy in this church are immediate representatives of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

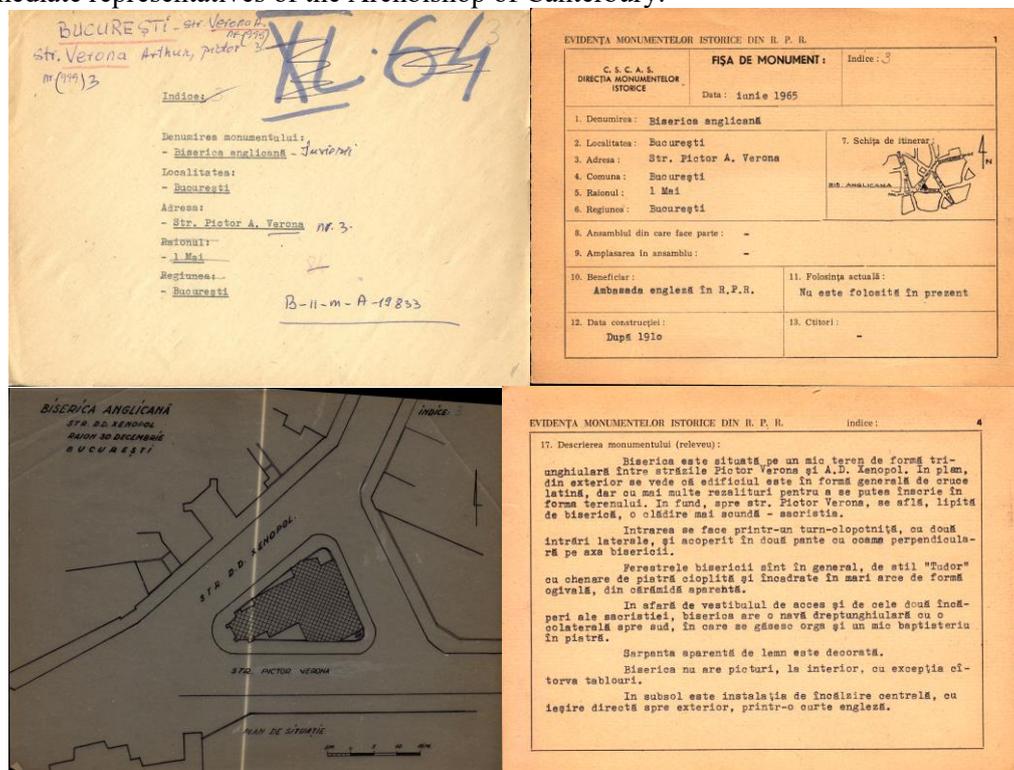


Figure 1 Pages extracted from the Anglican Church's historical monument file – from the National Heritage Institute's Archives – File: FEV-B-II-M-A-19833. The pages show the minimum description of the monument and its location.

The Anglican Church is a real phenomenon closely linked to the modern history of Romania and reflects the subsequent near relation of the Royal Houses of Britain and Romania in the early twentieth century. The presence of the building has been recorded since 1850, under the patronage of the Church's Mission to the Jews in Olteni Street, led by Reverend F. G. Klenheim. The funeral of Katherine Hoabowsky on July 22, 1862 and the marriage ceremonies of Joseph Lee and Eliza Wiest on September 12 are recorded in the Mission registers, observing the ritual and ceremonies of the Anglican Church.

Reverend F. G. Klenheim can be considered the founder of the Church of the Resurrection in Bucharest. At the reverend's initiative, the fund was set up for the construction of an Anglican Church in Bucharest. In August 1881 the appeal for the collection of funds, made by Mrs. Klenheim, is recorded.

Unfortunately, his successor, Reverend J. Muhlenbruch, who followed his steps since 1888, did not continue the work of the previous Reverend (n.r. F.G. Klenheim). It was only in 1896, with the appointment of Reverend Stewart Patterson as Chaplain of Bucharest and the Danube ports, that the work of collecting funds for the construction of the church was resumed.

In 1900, with the support of Queen Mary of Romania, the fundraising for the construction of the Anglican Church received decisive help.

Queen Mary of Romania (Marie Alexandra Victoria, 29 October 1875 – 18 July 1938) was Princess Mary of Edinburgh, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom. Queen Mary's parents were Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh and Grand Duchess Mary Alexandrovna of Russia. She married Prince Regent (Crown Prince) Ferdinand I, King of Romania.

Thus, in December 1900, with the support of Queen Mary, the British ambassador in Bucharest, Sir John Gordon Kennedy, received a donation from the Romanian State, for the British Crown, in the form of a 363 m² plot of land in the center of Bucharest, for the construction of the Anglican Church. The act was signed on behalf of the Romanian state by the mayor of Bucharest at the time, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea. The donation was accepted by the British Crown in 1912.

Queen Mary of Romania, granddaughter of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom, supported the construction of the church. In 1900, she commissioned the project by the architect Victor Ștefănescu[3], a close relative of the royal family. The architect Victor Ștefănescu was born on May 4, 1877, in Bucharest. His father, George Ștefănescu, composer, was the founder of the Romanian Opera. The architect with specialized studies in Paris was a promoter of neo-Romanian architecture. He carried out numerous important and valuable architectural projects in Bucharest, such as the Museum of Geology, the extension of the North Railway Station, the development of the Carol Park (through which he promoted the Neo-Romanian style in the public space), private buildings, and in the country, among which we exemplify: the Cathedral The coronation in Alba Iulia, the royal residence and the episcopal palace (1921 – 1922), the restoration of the Hunchiarde Glass in Constanța (1907).[4]

The original plan of the church, made of stone, was modified by the Office of Works in England (H. M. Office of Works in England), opting for a red brick construction, with a British Neo-Gothic style architecture, similar to the buildings of the British legation. In this sense, the architect Victor Ștefănescu approached the project in a Victorian Neo-Gothic style of Elizabethan origin.[5]



Figure 2 Photograph extracted from the Anglican Church's historical monument file - National Heritage Institute's Archives – File: FEV-B-II-M-A-19833. The southern and eastern elevations.

In 1911, 100,000 lei had already been collected in the funds for the construction of the church. In 1913, the construction of the church began, which was completed a year later, in 1914. The Bishop of Gibraltar, Dr. Knight, donated the altar (holly table), and Crown Princess Mary offered 15,000 lei from the King's charity funds Carol I, which were added to the church maintenance fund and 5,000 lei for equipping the church with an organ (which will be called Victory Thanks Giving). After the passing away of Queen Mary, a chalice and a plate were donated to the church, in her memory, used in divine service even today.

The beginning of the First World War prevented the church from being equipped with the necessary furniture, ordered from the United Kingdom, which is why the church remained closed until 1920. The first religious service was held on April 4, 1920, on Easter Sunday, after the end of the First War Mondial, when the construction was completed and equipped with the organ. Queen Mary, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England, later attended the place of worship, although she had converted to the Orthodox religion, following her marriage to King Ferdinand.

During the First World War, the church continued religious service as part of the Anglican Mission to the Jews, in the building in Olteni Street, as well as in a new building, erected in 1919, in Negustori Street, Mr. Adeney's building. During the war, the premises in Olteni Street were requisitioned and used as a hospital by the Red Cross Society.

A special religious event is recorded on November 10, 1918. On that date, a religious service was held for British prisoners of war, guarded at that time by German sentinels. On the same day, German troops began to withdraw from Bucharest and Romania.

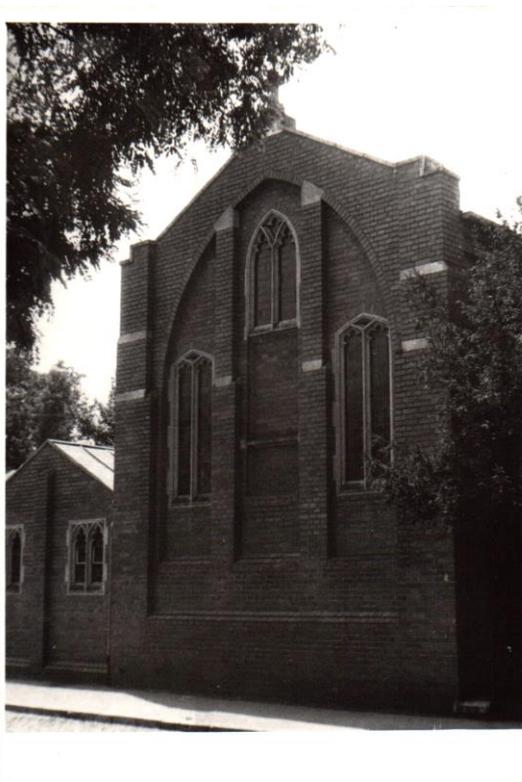


Figure 3 Photograph extracted from the Anglican Church's historical monument file - National Heritage Institute's Archives – File: FEV-B-II-M-A-19833. The eastern elevation showing the window's decoration.

During the Second World War (1940-1944), the church was closed. All this time, the church was cared for and administered by Queen Mary. She was decorated with the Order of St. Augustine of Canterbury (1982) by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, Robert Runcie, for the 60 years dedicated to this place of worship.

During the communist period that followed, the Anglican Church was the only one in Eastern Europe that continued to function. In the 70s, the communist regime tried to transform the church into a library for the British Council. The Anglican Church survived the totalitarian regime well.



Figure 4 Photograph showing the arrangement of the space around the church (2024 ©Mara Popescu)

Currently, the space around the church has been set up as a pedestrian zone, and in front of the church a statue was erected (2008), the work of the sculptor Virgil Scripcariu[6]. The statue is called „Maternity” and it represents a pregnant woman carrying a child in her arms, Saint George, who is piercing a dragon with a spear. The plinth of the statue is made up of two monolithic limestone elements, a column, which supports the statue and the cylindrical base. The column has a double role: a monument, but also a fountain, which was intended to be used by passers-by[7], but it is broken nowadays.



Figure 5 The statue „Maternity” by Virgil Scripcariu (2024 ©Mara Popescu)

„The church is located on a small triangular plot between the intersection of Pictor A. Verona and A.D. Xenopol streets. In the plan, from the outside, it can be seen that the edifice is in the general shape of a Latin cross, but with many cuts to be able to fit into the shape of the land. In the rear, towards Pictor A. Verona street, there is a smaller building attached to the church - the sacristy.”[8]

The south elevation contains the main access to the building, through a bell tower, which precedes the nave of the church, with two side entrances and covered, in two slopes, having the ridge perpendicular to the axis of the church. The flared buttresses create a vertical presence around the main body and tower. The construction system and materials used here are: load-bearing brick walls, wooden roof frame with sheet metal covering.



Figure 6 The main entrance (2024 ©Mara Popescu)

The windows of the church are generally in the „Tudor” style with carved stone surrounds and framed in large ogival-shaped arches of exposed brick.

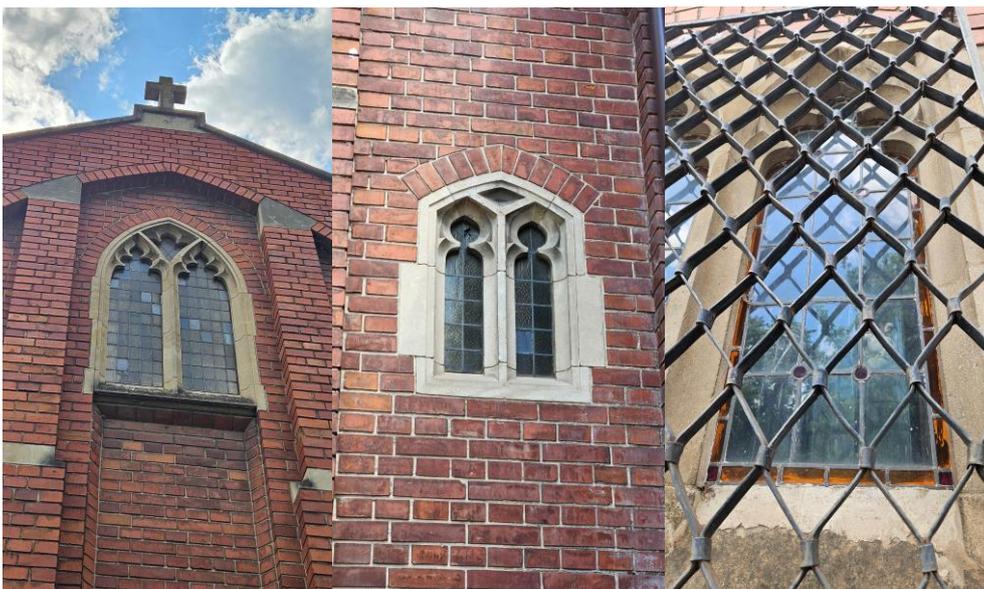


Figure 7 The decorated stone window frames highlighted by the building’s red brick

In the interior, apart from the vestibule of access and the two rooms of the sacristy, the church has a rectangular nave with a collateral to the south, which houses the organ and a small stone baptistery.

The church has no wall paintings inside, it is all white, except for a few paintings with religious scenes. The vaulted ceiling of the main space is composed of divided brown painted wooden panels. The vault surrounds the choir and hall, which are situated in a single rectangular space.

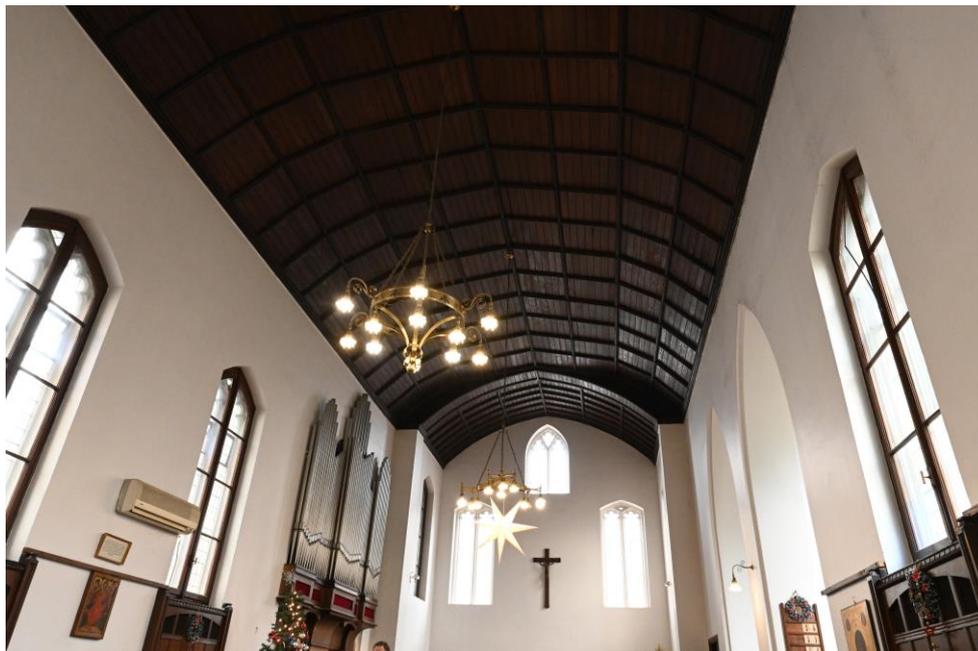


Figure 8 The vaulted wooden ceiling of the church (2019 ©Mara Popescu)

In the basement is the central heating installation, with direct exit to the outside through an English courtyard (Figure 9).

The building reflects specific elements of the Victorian Neo-Gothic style. The use of exposed red brick, Tudor-style windows with carved stone surrounds, ogival arches, and a wooden vaulted ceiling are characteristic features of this period.[9] These elements were frequently used in Anglican churches built in Britain and overseas during the Victorian era.[10] The sobriety of the interior, marked by whitewashed walls and minimal decorative iconography, corresponds to the liturgical style promoted by the Anglican Church at the time.[11]

Although the architect Victor Ștefănescu is known primarily for his contribution to Neo-Romanian architecture, the choice of Victorian Neo-Gothic style for this building was likely made under the influence of the British authorities involved in the commission, in particular the H. M. Office of Works.[12] Ștefănescu may have worked as a local executor adapting the architectural requirements of the British Church, rather than expressing his personal stylistic preferences.[13]



Figure 9 The exit from the basement is done through an English courtyard (2024 ©Mara Popescu)

Perhaps a relevant comparative example is the Queen's Cross Church in Glasgow, designed by the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and completed in 1899. It is the only church he built during his career.[14] Although both the Anglican Church of Bucharest and Queen's Cross Church were built in the Neo-Gothic style, they differ in their purpose and architectural expression. The church in Bucharest, with its Tudor-style windows, symmetrical plan in the shape of a Latin cross, and flared buttresses, was intended to represent the British presence in Romania and serve the diplomatic and religious needs of the community. In contrast, Queen's Cross Church was built for a small Free Church congregation in Glasgow and reflects Mackintosh's personal approach to Gothic Revival architecture, combining Gothic elements with early Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts influences.[15]

The exterior of Queen's Cross Church is built in red sandstone and features asymmetrical volumes, including a sculptural corner tower and decorative carvings of birds, plants, animals, and abstract forms.



Figure 10 Queen's Cross Church Glasgow - Designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh between 1897 and 1899 (2017 ©Tony Hisgett, Birmingham, UK)

Inside, the church has a timber-lined vaulted ceiling and a carved wooden pulpit, designed with symbolic natural motifs.[16] The interior creates a warm and unified atmosphere, with stained glass and furniture also designed by Mackintosh. Compared to this, the Anglican Church in Bucharest has a more austere and simplified interior, with whitewashed walls, a painted wooden ceiling, and very few decorative elements, corresponding to the Anglican liturgical style of the early 20th century.

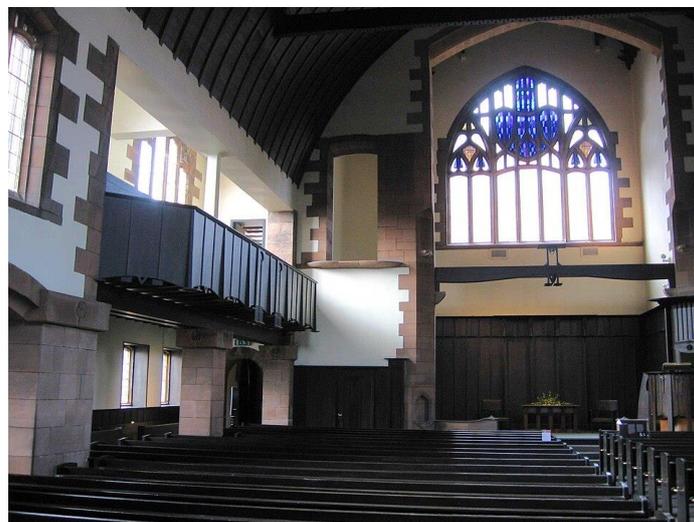


Figure 11 Interior view of the Queen's Cross Church Glasgow (2007 ©Dave Souza)

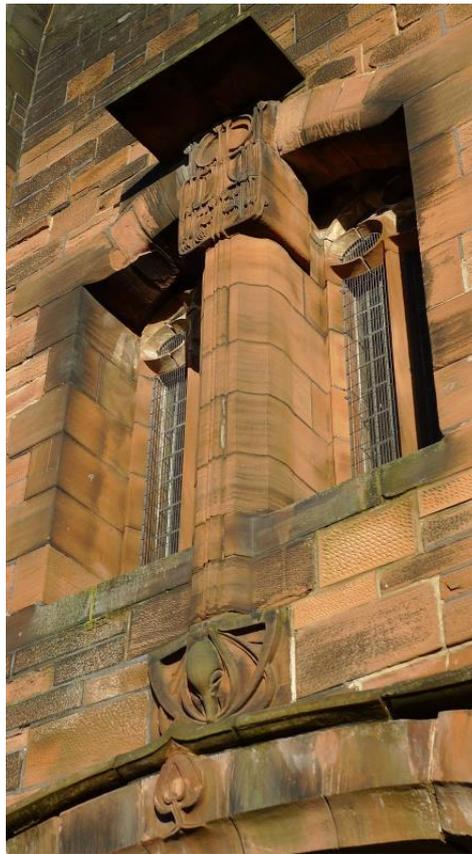


Figure12 „The carving above the S.E. porch door represents a stylised, elongated tree, its trunk rising like a fat mullion between a pair of two-light windows, with a leaf and the disembodied head of a bird at its base. Trees and birds occur often in Mackintosh's decorative work, but in this case they may have an unusually precise meaning. The carving seems to be a fusion of the emblem of the Free Church of Scotland (the burning bush, as seen by Moses in the Old Testament Book of Exodus) with that of the United Presbyterian Church (the dove and olive branch from the Old Testament story of Noah)”[17](2011 ©Mackintosh Architecture, University of Glasgow)

Although conceived in different contexts, both churches demonstrate the flexibility of the Neo-Gothic style across national and cultural settings. Mackintosh's design reflects a personal artistic vision developed in Scotland, while the church in Bucharest was part of a broader institutional framework, representing British tradition abroad.

The comparison between the Anglican Church of Bucharest and the Queen's Cross Church in Glasgow highlights two different ways of interpreting the Neo-Gothic style at the beginning of the 20th century. Although both churches use similar architectural elements, such as Tudor-style windows, red brick or stone façades, and wooden vaulted ceilings, they were built in different cultural and historical contexts. The Anglican Church in Bucharest was designed as a place of worship for the British community and as a symbol of diplomatic presence in Romania. In contrast, Queen's Cross Church was built for a local congregation in Glasgow and reflects the personal style of the architect. The comparison shows how the Neo-Gothic style could be adapted according to the function, location, and purpose of the building, contributing to a better understanding of the role of architecture in religious and cultural identity during that period.

The Anglican Church of the Resurrection stands as a testament to the enduring presence and influence of the Anglican community in Romania. It continues to serve as a place of worship, cultural exchange, and community gathering for Anglicans and the wider Bucharest community.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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