

The REREDOS

A **Reredos** is a large ornamental screen which covers the wall at the back of an altar. It often includes images of a biblical or religious nature and can be made of wood, stone, metal, or other materials. The images may be painted, carved, or inlaid with mosaics. In some cases, a **Reredos** may contain niches in which statues of saints can be found.

The **Reredos** is a memorial to Catherine, Countess of Ellesmere, who died on 17th April **1866**. It was erected in her memory by members of her family. Most likely, it would have been installed within a couple of years of her death. Certainly, it had been done prior to 1882, according to an old photograph. It was cleaned and restored in **1958**, together with the mosaics on either side of the east window. The inscription beneath the full panel reads:

+In memory of Harriet Catherine Countess of Ellesmere +Born October 27, 1803. Erected by her children.

The **Reredos** is a beautiful piece of Italian craftsmanship of alabaster inlaid with coloured marbles and mosaics in intricate geometric patterns. There are nine panels: angels bearing scrolls, two censers, a virgin bearing a lily, and a mother and child. The fine central panel depicts Christ with right hand raised in blessing, seated above sun, moon and rainbow. In the top corners of the panel are the letters A and W (representing the Greek Alpha and Omega).



The origin and manufacture of the **Reredos** is, to date, uncertain. This extends across the full width of the chancel and is a typical Scott design in alabaster, inset with polished coloured stones surrounding panels of glass mosaic, which are very similar to those that Antonio Salviati

of Venice was making for the Albert Memorial at that time. It is believed that Scott was the designer, and that it was made by the firm of Clayton and Bell, whose works were also manufactured by Salviati. These names were also responsible for the Reredos above the altar of Westminster Abbey. Sadly, the archives of their firm were destroyed during the Blitz.

Harold Milliken writes that it is believed that it came from Italy or may have been made by Italian craftsmen in London. By 1867, the firm was already very well known in England, with premises in the fashionable parts of London and Salviati mosaics had already been installed in "more than fifty Catholic and Protestant Churches in England."

The four angels in the panels are holding scrolls. The first on the left says "*Blessed are the dead.*" The second says: "*Which die in the Lord.*" The third and fourth, to the right of the main centre panel, say "*For they rest from their labours,*" followed by "*And their works do follow them.*"

The two panels adjacent to the centre panel depicting Christ show two women. The one to the left is a mother holding her child, with the word *Caritas* inlaid. The other is of a virgin holding a lily, with the word *Puritas* inlaid.

The centre panel represents Christ, *Salvator Mundi*. Interestingly, it closely resembles the 'Lost Leonardo' painting of the same name. Notice in both cases the gesture of the blessing given with Christ's right hand. Even the crystal-like feature of the globe held in the left hand are very similar.

