

The Church of Holy Angels. (A note on the Church Design)

In September, 1958 Fr Gerald McDonald, curate at St Edward's, Runcorn, was appointed by Bishop John Murphy as parish priest, residing initially with the Christian Brothers at Woodeaves, but with a brief to build a church dedicated to the Holy Angels

The church was designed by Arthur Farebrother, a young Catholic architect living in Hale Barns, who had been influenced by Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight when visiting as a chorister to hear Gregorian chant. In consequence the church incorporates a number of architectural features found at Quarr, such as the remarkable spatial effect with its outstanding interior brickwork, including specially made bricks to form angles and arches, interesting door openings, window edgings and diagonal ribs crossing the nave. A large and



beautiful rose window at the rear, provided by a generous parishioner, is one of the glories of the church, while the angels motif on the face of the altar features appropriately as the church's logo.

Designed as a Choir Church, the building had to be narrower than intended as special piling was needed with the discovery of a prehistoric glacial lake under the site. The foundation stone was laid by Bishop Grasar on 15 September 1962. The church cost some £80,000 and was built by T Brown and Sons of Wilmslow. The completed church was dedicated on 12 March 1964. The debt was cleared in 1980 due to the efforts of an enterprising Parish Committee, while the Ladies Blessed Sacrament Guild, formed in the early days, continued to meet the cost of altar requirements - altar cloths, hosts, wine, candles, etc. - and in 1974, provided a beautiful stained glass rose window in the Lady Chapel.



Within the conception, design and construction of Holy Angels Church, two chapels were incorporated – the Lady Chapel and a smaller Chapel of St Joseph. The altar within the Lady Chapel dedicated to Mary as Mother of the Whole Christ holds the tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. A separate Baptistry, at a lower level than the church, but connected to it, and containing the baptismal font was provided, all in strict liturgical conformity. The design also included an integral shrine to The Sacred Heart. All statues were to be white in conformity with the overall architectural concept.

Following the Second Vatican Council the altar rails which formed a significant feature of the architectural design were removed, and the baptismal font was uprooted from the baptistry and relocated in the transept on the grounds of visibility. As a result the traditional authentic liturgical concept of the newly baptised rising from the baptismal waters and being led up into full communion with the Church was lost. A proposal to convert the baptistry into a chapel for quiet meditation was rejected, and instead it became a library (or rather, a receptacle for surplus and unwanted religious books), which it remained until a new parish priest moved the books to the passageway behind the main altar, and converted the baptistry into a small meeting room, covering the original brickwork, an integral part of the church's overall design concept, with plasterboard.

Shortly after the removal of the altar rails and the relocation of the baptismal font, the statue of Our Lady above her altar in the Lady Chapel, with the twelve stars surrounding her, was removed and put on a side wall, to be replaced with embroidered panels suggesting a theme related somewhat to the Blessed Sacrament. The reasoning seems to have been a defective idea on the part of the Parish Priest of the time that Mary the Mother



Ingres, The Virgin of the Host. 1854.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

of the Whole Christ was unsuitable to be associated with Christ her Son's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Fortunately, her crowned insignia on the front of the dedicated altar remains.

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