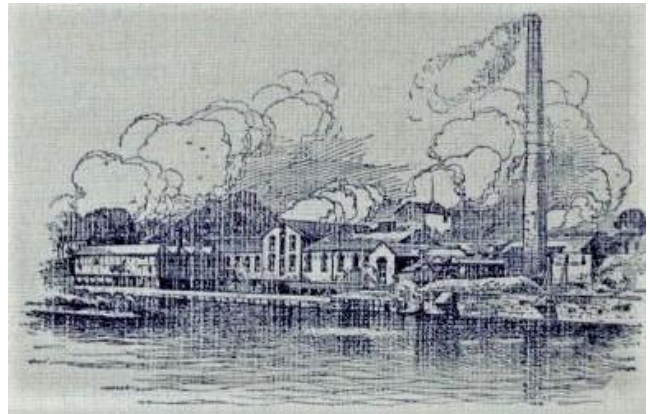


St. Mary's Church, Partington & Carrington (1013)

Statement of Significance

Setting of the Church - Local and Social History

Partington was first recorded in the year 1260, located in the medieval parish of Bowdon in the county of Cheshire. Partington is situated about 11 miles south-west of Manchester between the villages of Warburton and Carrington and was originally part of the ancient fee of the Massey family of nearby Dunham Massey. During the reign of Edward I, Lord of the Manor, Hamon de Massey rented out large portions of the estate including the village of Partington to various tenants. The rural village consisted then only of small scattered farms. In 1732 plans were made to build Partington Paper Mill on the banks of the River Mersey which bordered the village, separating it from Lancashire. This was the first significant industry in Trafford. The mill had several owners, the last being the Occleston family, owners for 98 years, and to whom there is a large and distinctive memorial in St. Mary's churchyard (pictured below). The mill was in use up to 1964, employing over 100 local people at its height. It was demolished in the early 1970s and is pictured here in a sketch of approx. 1917.



Partington railway station opened in 1873 with the construction of the Cheshire Lines Railway link between Broadheath and Warrington, and was in use until 1964. Partington saw further industrialisation following the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal finished in 1894, then forming the new northern border of the parish, at the time the largest river navigation canal in the world. At the canal's widest point in Partington a coaling basin was built so that coal from the Lancashire and Yorkshire coalfields could access shipping routes to the sea. Though Partington, and nearby Carrington, became increasingly industrialised, Partington still relied on farming with fertile soil and arable land which still surrounds the village.

St. George's Church in the nearby village of Carrington was consecrated as a chapel of ease in 1759. Carrington thus became one of the ancient chapelries of Cheshire consisting of Carrington and the then smaller neighbouring village of Partington. St. Mary's was the new church provided for the people of Partington for their own parish, consecrated in 1884 by the then new Bishop of Chester. The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser newspaper reported on Friday 30th May 1884:

“One of the first prominent public acts of the recently appointed Bishop of Chester (Dr. Stubbs) was the consecration, yesterday, of the new church which has been erected and dedicated to St. Mary, in the pretty little village of Partington, about five miles from Sale, in the adjacent county Chester. The church would not be inaptly described as an ideal village church, being almost severely simple in its design, but most convenient in its arrangements. Until now the residents of Partington and of the immediate vicinity have had no nearer church than that of Carrington, nearly two miles distant, and the erection of the new building will supply what has long been deeply-felt want.”

At the time of construction St. Mary's Church served Partington's population of around 600, living in a few streets of houses alongside a couple of public houses, grocers, farms and cottage industries, surrounded by countryside. The village grew with the construction of housing for workers of Partington Coal Gas Works which opened in 1929 following the increased demand for fuel in the nearby city of Manchester.

Partington Village remained relatively unchanged until the 1950s when a plan was put forward by the Bucklow Rural District Council to transform the village into a 'model town', housing overspill tenants from house clearances Manchester, Salford and Stretford. 800 new houses were initially constructed and by 1961 the population of Partington steadily rose to around 6000. Partington was thus transformed from a quiet, rural farming village into a small town in which St. Mary's Church formed the historic centre.

In 1963 the Benefices of Partington and Carrington were united, although the parishes remained separate. In 1990 the parishes were united and St. George's Church was vested with the Redundant Churches Fund, now the Churches Conservation Trust. Prior to local Government reorganisation in 1974 Partington village was in Cheshire, but today it is administered by the Metropolitan Borough of Trafford in Greater Manchester. Further construction of social housing took place in the 1970s and 1980s such that today Partington is a small town of just over 8000 inhabitants. Partington has 1 secondary and 3 primary schools, Catholic, Baptist and Methodist churches and a newly rebuilt shopping precinct opened in 2014.

The Church Urban Fund rates Partington & Carrington in the top 3% of England's parishes on a scale of the most socially deprived in the country based on indices of poverty, life expectancy, population demographics and education. However, Partington has a positive community spirit and identity and has undergone something of a resurgence in recent years with a great deal of new housing construction planned and underway, notably on cleared former industrial sites, which are set to significantly increase the local population in the next 10 years.

This potted industrial and social history of Partington gives rise to the unusual situation of having an historic, Grade II listed, rural, distinctive stone church building as the focal centre of a predominately social housing estate on the outskirts of a large metropolitan city.

Commissioning and the Architect of St. Mary's Church Building

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin was built in 1883-1884 at a cost of £2,465 towards which Mr. William Cunliffe-Brooks, Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for East Cheshire contributed the handsome sum of £1,000. A considerable portion of the remainder was provided by the Rev. Canon George Heron M.A, Rural Dean of Bowdon, who himself laid the memorial stone of the church.

The new church for Partington was designed by Scottish architect George Truefitt (1824–1902) based in Bloomsbury Square, London. Messrs. Southern and Sons builders of Salford were the contractors for the work. Truefitt was one of the lesser-known founding fathers of the prestigious Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, the oldest independent school of architecture in the UK. Truefitt was known as a distinctly eccentric and non-conformist designer since his formative years, and the prosperity of his patronage largely dependent on the banker, barrister and MP William Cunliffe-Brooks.



Truefitt's most interesting and original buildings expressed modern sensibilities far ahead of his peers, with his most innovative buildings appearing after 1870. Truefitt's designs attracted much controversy but were recognised as works of art. Truefitt is famous for designing buildings throughout England and over 15 in other countries, 250 structures in all including 16 churches and chapels. None of his churches were deemed academically correct, but this did not bother him. He published the book 'Designs for Country Churches' in 1850 exploring some of his distinctive design ideas.

Writing in the RIBA Journal, in 2017, Tszwai So said

“Truefitt’s buildings and approach are perhaps even more pertinent today, and have a lasting resonance for which he should be better remembered.”

Truefitt developed a contextualised approach to architecture by exploring the use of locally sourced materials. This is well demonstrated at St. Mary's Church which is faced externally in red rock sandstone attributed to quarries in nearby Runcorn just 15 miles west of Partington.

The Church was Grade II listed on 17th January 2001.

Design and Fittings of St. Mary's Church Building



Exterior

St. Mary's Church is sandstone rock faced with ashlar dressing and plain rosemary clay tile roofs, built in the North European Gothic style with plinth and buttresses. The windows are pointed arches with plain surrounds. The nave and chancel are under a continuous roof, with a distinctive tower containing the original vestry at the southeast corner, and a porch with main entrance on the south side. A church hall was added on the north side in 1975 and rebuilt in 1991, and whilst of no special architectural interest the hall does not detract from the original composition and main approach to the church. The newly built extension comprises a large parish room, kitchen, toilets, a new vestry, small office and second larger office on the first floor.



The east end has a 3-light window with datestone beneath, and 2-light pointed leaded archway windows to the old vestry now containing the church heating system. The south side has a gabled porch entrance with pointed arched doorway containing two solid wooden exterior doors, giving way to a new single wooden door with large glass windows. The south side has a single arched window to the west of the entrance and three arched windows to the right. The west end has two tall pointed archway windows of patterned antique coloured glass. The north side has three single arched windows, the remainder covered by the 20th century extension.

The 3-light window in the chancel comprises stained glass by Percy Bacon of London with a central depiction of Christ on the cross and further biblical scenes. The central window on the south and north side has memorial stained glass dated 1913. These windows depict 'Jesus Light of the World' based on William Holman Hunt's painting to the north side and 'Jesus the Good Shepherd' to the south side. The south side has 4 bays to the left of the tower which comprise the Garden of Remembrance for cremated remains with large red marble granite memorial plaques.

Tower

The unusual tower is unbuttressed and comprises 3 stages, with a plain pointed arched door to the south to access the old vestry. The first stage has a quatrefoil window on each side, below a blind gable. The bell stage is ashlar stone and set back, above which is a timber framed bell enclosure with openings under cusped heads containing trefoils. Originally the tower contained three bells, cast by the well-known founder, John Taylor of Loughborough, however these were reportedly removed and sold to another church in 1990. A modern speaker system is now used to replicate the bell's ringing. The tower is completed with a tiled hipped square spire.

Interior

The interior of the church is strikingly plain but well arranged. The chancel is raised significantly above the nave, and instead of being divided from it by single arch, as is common, the separation is by very unusual ashlar triple arch with chamfered pointed openings, supported by circular shafts of polished pink granite, with freestone exaggerated Romanesque capitals and bases. These shafts are hewn stone from a quarry in Aberdeenshire, and were the gift of Mr. William Cunliffe-Brooks, M.P., in addition to his donation of £1,000 to the building fund mentioned previously. The chancel houses a large traditional pipe organ built by Alex Young & Sons, organ builders of Manchester and installed in 1900.

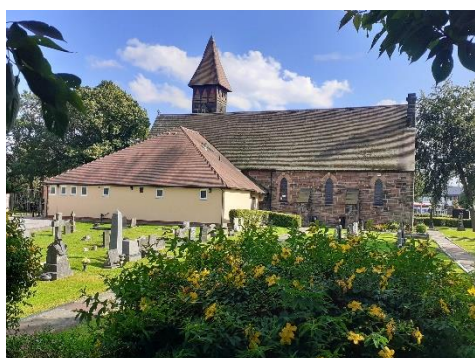


The chancel has cusped panelled wooden reredos, an open altar table and wooden altar rails that can be moved into position on the lowest chancel step to allow for easier access for communicants. Other 20th century furniture includes two carved wooden chairs, a lectern and credence table. There are memorial brasses dated 1908 and 1923, and war memorial brasses for 1918 and 1945.

The walls are rendered and painted white. The nave floor is of parquet wood whilst the chancel, originally tiled, is now carpeted. The nave contains 124 wooden seats with cinnabar red upholstered seating pads. Modern up-lighting has replaced the original hanging lamps. A data-projector in the nave projects words and images onto a screen to the left of the archway for worship services, which can be retracted when not in use. The chancel roof has cusped principal wooden rafters, cambered laminated cross-beams, and kingposts with curved braces. The Nave has similar roof structure, with plain principal rafters. Plain doorways connect the nave to the St. George's extension (church hall) and the chancel both to the new vestry and the old vestry at the base of the tower. The main entrance on the south side has a pointed arched doorway.

Grounds and Churchyard

The curtilage of St. Mary's Church is formed by the following: The south boundary and main entrance is a red sandstone wall with substantial red sandstone coping. The west boundary is formed by a long, trimmed hedge. The north boundary is green painted metal fence and chain link fence hidden with tended hedges. The east boundary is shared with the vicarage and comprises wooden fence panels. Access to the church car park is via a bricked and gated entrance on the far north side, from River Lane.



St. Mary's has a churchyard which is now closed except for burials in existing family graves where there is sufficient space or interment of ashes in the Garden of Remembrance in the bays of the south side of the building. Some 1035 burials are recorded at St. Mary's dating back to 1890 and the grounds contain some large and ornate grave memorials from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The grave memorials are regularly inspected and maintained.

In the past the churchyard had suffered from spates of vandalism and graffiti and proved difficult to maintain. Thus, a diverse team of volunteers was formed, drawn from the local community alongside church members to maintain and develop the grounds 2 days a week. Volunteers have included young and older, men and women, able bodied and disabled, employed and unemployed and asylum seekers. Thus, over the past 20 years the grounds have been transformed into a much-cherished and frequently visited asset to our local community providing a space for rest, recreation and remembrance. Grave plots are mowed and maintained whilst areas of land have been developed into attractive and sustainable planting providing impressive varied displays of colour and a haven for wildlife in the spring, summer and autumn.



In 2019 the churchyard and grounds were awarded the highest Grade 5 "Outstanding" Award in the Royal Horticultural Society, North West Britain in Bloom Competition. The grounds include a Spiritual Garden where planting is themed around Bible stories, such as a rainbow covenant with Noah, the Last Supper and Moses and the Burning Bush, and is regularly visited by groups of local school children.

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