

History of our Church



St Ethelbert's Church or **Our Lady Immaculate and St Ethelbert's Church** is a **Roman Catholic** parish church in Slough, Berkshire, England. It was built from 1908 to 1910 and designed by Benedict Williamson. It is located on the corner of Wellington Street and William Street in the centre of the town. It is in the **Gothic Revival** style and is a **Grade II** listed building.

A fine landmark church, its design inspired by the medieval churches of Norfolk. The building has a tall, spacious interior and a number of furnishings of note. The presbytery is almost contemporary and is built of similar materials. –

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Foundation

In the early 1880s, an Italian priest named Fr Joseph Clemente arrived in Slough as chaplain to Baylis House School. While he was there, he worked on getting a permanent Catholic church in the town. Fr Clemente and his supporters subsequently raised enough money to buy the freehold of a disused warehouse and stable on Herschel Street, not far to the south of the present church. These buildings were converted to become the first St Ethelbert's church, in 1885.



Construction

In 1888, Fr Clemente gave up his chaplaincy at Baylis House in order to devote himself to St Ethelbert's and in 1889 the present site on Curzon Street was bought for £1,050. Fundraising efforts progressed slowly; work on the building did not begin on the church until May 1908, assisted by a donation by the Superior of St Bernard's convent in Slough, in memory of her parents. The church was designed by the architect-priest Fr Benedict Williamson, assisted by Fr J. Francis Drake, chaplain at the convent, who apparently influenced the building's East Anglian character. Another influence may have been Bentley's Holy Rood, Watford, also a flint church in the Perpendicular Gothic style, completed ten years earlier. The foundation stone at Slough was laid and blessed on 1st July 1908. The builders were Messrs. Godson & Sons. Consecration and opening took place on 19th and 20th April 1910.

Developments

A statue of Christ the Redeemer, blessed by the Pope and originally intended for Westminster Cathedral, was acquired in 1912, and now stands by the side entrance facing the street.

In 1980, a major scheme of repair and reordering by Anthony New of Seely & Paget included the relocation of rood screen to a new position behind the altar (which had already been moved forward to allow for westward celebration), as well as the moving of the font to the sanctuary area, where a new ambo replaced the pulpit.

Furnishings

The design of the church draws inspiration from the medieval churches of Norfolk, particularly St Nicholas at Wells-next-the-Sea. The church is in English Perpendicular Gothic style, built in local stock brick faced with Chiltern flint and Kentish ragstone. Site limits required a north-south orientation, but this description follows conventional liturgical orientation (i.e. chancel to the east). The plan consists of sanctuary, nave, aisles, Lady Chapel (north of the sanctuary), Passion Chapel (south of the sanctuary), northwest porch and west tower. Adjoining the Passion Chapel is a sacristy with a covered passageway to the presbytery. The total length of the church is 130 ft; the width of the nave and aisles is almost 55 ft. The tower, crowned by a leaded octagonal spirelet, is 24 ft square and 74 ft high. The internal walls are plastered, apart from the Bath stone columns and arches. The window tracery is Portland stone.

Furnishings include a wide, 26 ft high oak rood screen and rood figures, originally at the chancel arch and moved further east in 1980. Beyond this at the back of the sanctuary, below the east window, is a timber reredos with canopied niches containing (from left to right) richly polychromatic figures of St Augustine, St Ethelbert, Our Lady, St Laurence and St George. There are two stone side altars. The side chapels have smaller oak screens, and there are parclose screens between the side chapels and the sanctuary (also in oak).

In front of the rood screen is a stone forward altar, ambo and stone octagonal font with wooden cover. The font was the gift of Mr James Elliman in 1912, and was moved to its current position in 1980, when the baptistery was converted into a reconciliation room and occasional shop. The plain wooden pews of the nave are probably original, the timber Stations of the Cross date from 1912. Stained glass in the nave windows depict (working clockwise from the west end) the Annunciation (John Hardman & Co., 1913); St Ethelbert (1921); the Millennium of Christianity in Poland (J. E. Nuttgens, 1966); the Baptism of Our Lord, St Henrietta of Compiègne and St Cecilia (all by John Hardman & Co., c.1914); the Visitation (A. J. Davies, Bromsgrove Guild, 1917); St Alban, St Thomas of Canterbury and St John Fisher (1918), and Saints Joachim and Anne (also by A. J. Davies, in memory of the Rev. Joseph Clemente, 1918). The remaining windows, including the clerestory lights, have clear glass.

The organ gallery under the tower is not original; the organ was originally in a gallery above the Passion Chapel. The belfry is reached by a circular turret stair in the south east corner of the tower.



General Interior, St. Ethelbert and Our Lady Immaculate, Slough.