

MENSTON 2025 HERITAGE GROUP

S S John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Church

Bradford Road, Burley in Wharfedale

1930 a separate church for Burley and Menston was proposed as the Otley church could not cope with the increasing numbers of Catholics. It was mainly financed by Frederick Le Fevre, a retired civil servant, who became the first priest of the church. *“A modest interwar church in the Early Christian style, with a light, Arts and Crafts-influenced interior.”*

1936 The Parish Hall was added

1980's major restoration - new foyer and passageway to the hall were added and the layout was rearranged to suit new liturgical requirements of Vatican Council II.

1989 The church and new altar were consecrated

2018 New organ installed

References

<https://www.ssfishermore.co.uk>

The church forms an attractive group with its presbytery and parish hall.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Catholics in the Burley and Menston areas would have attended Our Lady and All Saints at Otley. It is thought that the idea for a new parish came from Fr Ignatius Saxton at Otley, and the land for a new church and presbytery in Burley was acquired in 1930. The project was funded by an initially anonymous benefactor, who turned out to be a local man, Frederick Le Fevre. After the death of his wife Florence, he trained to become a priest and was ordained at the age of 66. He offered to build the church as a memorial to his wife, and he donated £2,396 of the total building costs of £3,500. The building was designed by the Bradford-based architectural practice Empsall, Clarkson & Clarke. The church seated 250 people and was opened by Bishop Cowgill on 12 June 1932. It was one of the first churches in England to be dedicated to the martyrs Thomas More and John Fisher who were canonised three years later in 1935.

In the late 1980s an extensive programme of repair and reordering was undertaken. The small porch in front of the main doors was removed and a ramp was constructed up to the entrance. The Lady Chapel was opened up with the creation of a new archway. The church was also connected to the parish hall.

The parish hall was built in July 1936, being presented anonymously by a friend of Fr Le Fevre's son Eric, who died at an early age.

Description

A simple red brick building with a red tile roof in the stripped-down Early Christian style so popular in this period. The liturgical east end in fact points west; considering that the building was constructed on a cleared, new site this would seem to be a deliberate act either on the part of the patron or architect. The (liturgical) west, entrance front presents a gable end elevation, the apex of which is surmounted by a small concrete cross. The central doorway has a projecting brick arch of three orders. On either side there is a round-arched metal-framed window with a raised header brick surround. At the top of the door arch is a mosaic tympanum of golden background with a central figure of Christ flanked by St John Fisher and St Thomas More. Above the doorway is a small circular window. The (liturgical) south elevation has four bays, with tall, narrow arch-headed windows, a fifth bay forms a connection to the sacristy and onto the presbytery. The (liturgical) north elevation is similar but now has a modern porch extension and link through to the church hall.

The interior has something of an Arts and Crafts character. The bay divisions are marked by plastered and painted parabolic arches rising up from the floor up to the open purlin truss ceiling. The nave walls are also painted white above a brick dado, creating a light and airy interior. The windows have decorative exposed brick dressings and there is a similar treatment to the arches leading into the Lady Chapel. The nave has a central aisle and to either side are the original, simple, heavy wooden benches. The (liturgical) west end is dominated by the organ built by

Wood Wordsworth of Leeds and installed in 1937. There are three steps up to the sanctuary which has a small modern altar. The rear wall of the sanctuary is a canted apse containing two stained glass windows depicting St John Fisher and St Thomas More. The separate Lady Chapel has a groin-vaulted plaster roof with a good stained glass window depicting the Madonna and Child, unsigned.

References

<https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/burley-in-wharfedale-st-john-fisher-and-st-thomas-more/>