

St Joseph's

The Guide



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A Guide Around St Joseph's

Welcome to the Catholic church of St Joseph in Skerton, Lancaster

Constructed between 1900-01 thanks to the generosity of Miss Margaret Coulston, a local woman whose family were major contributors to the Catholic Church in Lancaster in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

St Joseph's is a local landmark and was beautifully designed by Peter Paul Pugin (1850-1904); the church is embellished with furnishings of the highest quality by some of the finest artists and craftsmen of the day including the local furniture makers Gillows of Lancaster. This guide is intended to draw your attention not only to the beauty of this church but also to highlight how this beauty was harnessed to give glory to God in this His dwelling place.

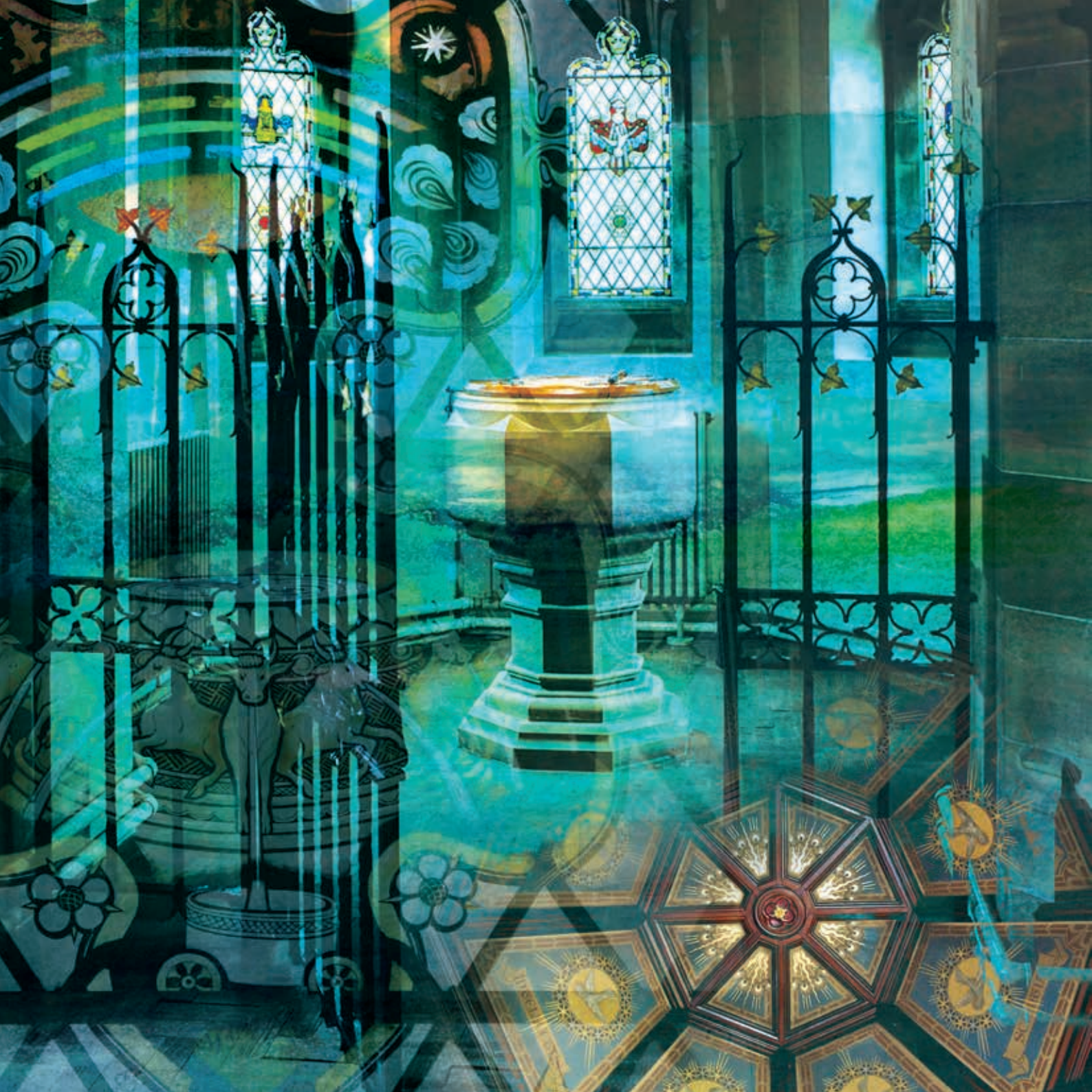
As you enter the church, you are immediately struck by the height of the ceiling, the colour of the stained glass, the decoration and furnishings. This evocation of glory is intentional: in entering the church, one enters the House of God, the place where Heaven and Earth meet.

The style of the church is Gothic, a style that flourished in the High and Late Medieval Age, and which resurfaced in the Nineteenth Century.

The pointed arches and the arched windows, reach gracefully towards the heavens. The whole of creation is caught up in this great upward sweep: the carved finials have a spring-like quality, almost as if they are budding forth life, and the sanctuary area, in particular, is replete with flowers, and carved foliage – vines and grapes, and fleurs de lys – and the four-leafed quatrefoils, and floral spandrels. And of course light streams through the lancet windows, the stained glass and tracery, creating an ethereal atmosphere of mystical union. Light and the way in which it suffuses the material world was understood by many of the medieval writers as a manifestation of God.

We very much hope that you too may touch the peace of this Church and marvel at its architectural beauty and splendour.







The Baptistry

On entering the church the first place of note is **The Baptistry**, located in the southwest corner to the right and close to the entrance. Traditionally, church baptisteries were located by the entrance as it is the place where the initiatory Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated. The Baptismal font is intended to serve as a reminder of our own Baptism into the faith each time we enter churches; this is also emphasised by the act of blessing ourselves with Holy Water when entering. As miniature chapels baptisteries are often beautifully detailed to emphasise the importance of the Sacrament and the space; the baptistry here at St Joseph's is no exception. The decorative steel gates serve to mark the area as a reserved space; inside the carved sandstone font has an understated but dignified presence. The space is lit by five stained glass windows decorated with images from the Scriptures related to Baptism. They comprise (from left to right): Noah's Ark, the means by which Noah and his family were sustained when God sent the flood waters to separate them from the sinful world; the Ark of the Covenant, containing the Ten Commandments, being carried across the River Jordan into the Promised Land; the Holy Spirit descending in the form of the Dove at Christ's Baptism;

the bronze laver in the Temple of Jerusalem, used by the priests of the Temple to cleanse themselves before approaching the altar; and, a rainbow, the enduring sign of God's Covenant with creation after the Flood and a sign of the Glory of God at the end of time, when Christ will be all in all. While all these images reflect the symbolism of water in baptism, the washing away of sin and the gift of new life, the octagonal ceiling of the chapel reveals another symbol. From the darkness above, fire falls from heaven, the heavenly tongues of fire that anointed the heads of the disciples at Pentecost. Again images of the Holy Spirit as a dove appear, though this time with the names of the seven sanctifying gifts of the Holy Spirit: Timor Domini (Fear of the Lord); Sapientia (Wisdom); Intellectus (Understanding); Consilium (Counsel); Fortitudo (Fortitude); Scientia (Knowledge); and, Pietas (Piety). Enwreathing the baptistry are the words in Latin from St John's Gospel:

'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit'.

The message is clear: in being baptised each person becomes a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and is filled with His power.





Our Lady of Perpetua
Succour Pray for us





The Pulpit

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Beside the entrance to the Baptistry is **The Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour**, which was installed in 1931. The painted image is a copy of the original icon that come from the Keras Kardiotissas Monastery on the Greek island of Crete and is now housed in the Church of St Alphonsus in Rome since it was removed from the monastery around 1499. Though believed to be the work of a Greek artist the date of the original is unknown; one legend states St Luke himself painted it and that the image of Our Lady is miraculous. The scene depicts Our Lady holding the infant Jesus with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel to the left and right. The infant Christ clings onto his mother's fingers as he looks upon the instruments of the Crucifixion. One of the sandals falling from Jesus' foot is believed to be a reference from the Old Testament by which the passing of a sandal to another symbolises the sealing of a contract. Here it points to the contract between Christ and ourselves, the new covenant established in his blood. The red dress worn by Our Lady represents Jesus' Passion; her blue mantle represents her perpetual virginity, and the veil, her pure modesty. An image of popular devotion, it is venerated by Latin Rite, the various Eastern Rite churches and the Orthodox churches alike.

The Pulpit located in the main body or nave of the church is the place from which the Gospel is proclaimed and the priest gives the sermon during Mass. Traditionally these are very ornate reflecting the importance of the proclamation of the Word of God. In this church, the ornate decoration of both the pulpit and high altar is also used to emphasise the link between the Word proclaimed from the pulpit and the Eucharist celebrated at the Altar. This carved oak pulpit is a particularly fine piece of craftsmanship; it was constructed and carved by a parishioner named Francis Duffy and three other men who all worked for Waring and Gillows as cabinetmakers. The decoration is particularly fine with details including Gothic blind tracery and dentilled mouldings. Carved along the outer face are words a psalm, "The declaration of thy Word O Lord giveth light. Grant me understanding". A photograph of the pulpit is said to have hung in the boardroom of the Gillows offices in London for many years in appreciation of the skill that went into its construction.

Our Lady





Candelabrum The Rood Cross



Standing next to the Pulpit is **The Paschal Candelabrum**, a magnificent candlestick with its swerving spiral shaft and cosmatesque mosaic inlay with star patterns and coloured and gilt glass tesserae in geometric patterns. The candlestick follows a style that originated in Rome in the Medieval Age; a perfect example remains in the church of San Clemente. Paschal Candles are renewed and blessed each year at Easter and used throughout Eastertide as a sign of the Passover when the pillar of fire led the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt, and when Christ the light passed over from death into the Resurrection. The flame symbolises the Presence of the Risen Christ amongst us and is lit at baptisms and at funerals.

Located at the east end of the church is **The Sanctuary**. This reserved space is the most important part of the church as it is the place where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered by the priest and also the space where the Blessed Sacrament, the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood, is kept in the **Tabernacle** in the centre of the **High Altar**.

The sanctuary is stepped up from the rest of the church and is separated by a set of intricately carved oak rails and gates, created by the four cabinetmakers of Waring and Gillows who produced the pulpit. They are profusely decorated with Gothic tracery and foliage details and the words 'Sanctus Sanctus' meaning 'Holy Holy', echoing the eternal song of the angels in Heaven. The rails not only serve as a separation between the sanctuary and the rest of the church but also as the place at which the faithful would kneel to receive Holy Communion during Mass.

Above the rails hangs **The Rood Cross**, the large crucifixion scene with Our Lady and St John the Evangelist either side of Christ on the Cross. This image is used to remind people of the unity between the Sacrifice of the Mass and Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross. It is carved of oak with painted figures and gold-leaf details. It is likely to have been carved either by the sculptors R. L. Boulton & Sons or by cabinetmakers of Waring and Gillows.

Tabernacle







The Sanctuary

The High Altar is the predominant feature of the church, housing the tabernacle, the dwelling place of our Lord who is present in the Blessed Sacrament. The altar is of carved Caen stone and marble with mosaic detailing. The reredos (the carved upper section) depicts scenes from the life of St Joseph from left to right, the Betrothal of Mary and Joseph; the finding of Jesus in the Temple; at work as a carpenter with the young Jesus in Nazareth; and on his deathbed, surrounded by Mary and Jesus. Statues include Our Lady and the Holy Infant (left), Angels in Adoration (surrounding the Blessed Sacrament plinth), and St Joseph (right). The altar frontal has mosaic depictions with Eucharistic motifs, from left to right: the Pelican in her Piety shedding her blood to feed her young; the Holy Eucharist; and, the Lamb of God, symbol of Christ as God's Sacrifice. Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) numerous liturgical reforms were introduced, affecting many aspects of Catholic worship. In 1970 the freestanding wooden altar located in the centre of the sanctuary was installed for the celebration of Mass.

The Sanctuary Wall Paintings

located on the wall above the high altar depict Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac (left) and Abraham with Melchizedek who is offering a sacrifice of bread and wine (right), two Old Testament images used to show how these ancient sacrifices were foretelling the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass. These splendid original details are likely to have been painted by Elphege Pippet (b. 1868) who was a church furnishings designer and artist who worked for Hardman of Birmingham and was a favourite of Peter Paul Pugin. Elphege's father, Joseph Aloysius, and his brothers Oswald and Wilfrid, also worked for Hardman as church artists and they produced work for many Catholic churches, though sadly much has been lost through re-decoration over the years. The themes of sacrifice in the wall paintings are picked up in the Latin script around the sanctuary walls, 'Christ the Lord, Priest forever, of the Order of Melchizedek, offers bread and wine', a quotation from the Book of Hebrews. This design explicates the action on the altar where the celebration of the Mass re-presents Christ's one and only sacrifice on the Cross. The words on the bronze doors of the Tabernacle echo those of the priest: 'Take this and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you' whilst those along the High Altar, written in mosaic, exhort us to 'Adore the Most Holy Sacrament for ever' and to 'Praise the Lord'.

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The High Altar





DEUS QUI NON EST

DEUS

QUI NON EST

SANS SAULCIUS

SANS SAULCIUS



Housed within the sanctuary are three striking **Stained Glass Windows**. The central (east) window depicts Christ seated in Glory with Our Lady and St Joseph kneeling at either side with angels incensing. The heavenly liturgy is united to the earthly liturgy. Beneath Christ is gathered a multitude of the faithful from all walks of life: spiritual authority in the form of the Pope who stands before St Peter's Basilica in Rome, and temporal authority in the form of a king. To the right of the king is a queen (identified as St Margaret of Scotland, Margaret Coulston's patroness, holding the Scottish thistle in her hand). There is also a cardinal, bishop, abbot, priest, deacon, a monk and a nun, a married couple, martyrs and virgins, old people, young people and children, sick people, a soldier, a builder, and representatives of the arts: a musician, a writer, a painter. Installed for the opening of the church, the manufacturer was Hardman of Birmingham one of the foremost stained glass producers in the 19th century. The windows to the north and south depict St Margaret and St Elizabeth and are dedicated to Margaret Coulston and her sister, Elizabeth. These windows are believed to have been produced by Shrigley and Hunt of Lancaster. The ceiling of the sanctuary is arrayed with colourful monograms, representing the Holy Name of Jesus (IHS) and the patron of the church, St Joseph (SJ).

The Sacred Heart Chapel is located to the south (right) of the sanctuary. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was developed in a large part thanks to St Gertrude, a Thirteenth-Century Benedictine nun, mystic and theologian, and, to St Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French nun, to whom Christ appeared on numerous occasions between 1673-75. The imagery of Christ's pierced heart is a reminder of his suffering in love for us; a redemptive fountain for us. The Sacred Heart Altar is of carved Caen stone and marble with mosaic detailing and was carved by R. L. Boulton & Sons. The reredos has a central relief of a heart, chalice, crown of thorns and crown with angels in adoration, and to the left and right are canopied reliefs of St Margaret Mary and St Gertrude who is identified with the mouse running up her abbatial crozier, a symbol of souls racing up to Heaven in response to our prayers. In her lifetime, St Gertrude had nurtured a strong devotion for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The window depicts the Sacred Heart, flanked by angels incensing; the manufacturer was Hardman of Birmingham. On the ceiling there are again monograms, this time reflecting the Triune God (Pater - Filius - Spiritus Sanctus), the source of all love (Caritas).



II

EDWARD L. BULTON
WILLIAM BROWN
JAMES W. HEART
JAMES W. HEART
JOSEPH R. NORTON
LEO HARTLEY
JOSEPH M. HERMAN

EDMUND W. BENTON
CYRIL HOLDEN
WILLIAM MURPHY
THOMAS MURPHY
JOHN NOON
WILLIAM PESTIFF
THOMAS SLAYER
THOMAS WALSH

SOLDIERS OF THIS PARISH WHO DIED BRAVELY
FIGHTING IN THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918

and they rest in peace



Jesus is nailed to the cross



Memorials

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The Lady Chapel

The Lady Chapel is located to the north (left) of the sanctuary. This is another beautifully detailed space within the church; the centrepiece is the Lady Altar made of Caen carved stone and marble with mosaic detailing. The carved reredos has a statue of Our Lady set within a niche (strikingly similar to that at St Mary's Morecambe). On either side of Our Lady are carved reliefs of the Nativity and the Flight into Egypt whilst the frontal depicts the Annunciation, all carved by R. L. Boulton & Sons. The altar was originally in the chapel of the mission school built in 1896. The strikingly beautiful window depicts the scene of the Nativity; the manufacturer was Hardman of Birmingham.

The Stations of the Cross run along the north and south aisles starting by the sacristy door. These 14 images chart Christ's trial, way to execution, death and burial. The early Christians are believed to have walked the route that Christ made known as the Via Dolorosa or Way of Sorrow as a memorial of Him, and pilgrims to Jerusalem have done so since the first millennium. The 'Stations' can be followed by anyone at anytime but are particularly followed during Lent and in Holy Week. The set of Stations here at St Joseph's are made of painted and carved solid oak and were made by Gillows when the church was built.

Located along in the north aisle a number of **Memorials**. The first is in memory of Fr. Philip A. O'Bryen, the first Parish Priest of St Joseph's, who died on 7th November 1913 aged 52 and in his 25th year of priesthood.

Nearby are the two memorials for the men of the parish who were killed in the First World War and those killed in Second World War and subsequent conflicts; the latter was erected in 1994.

Outside there is one main feature of note. **The Memorial Cross** outside the main entrance of the church marks the grave of Miss Margaret Coulston, foundress of this church who died on 13th April 1909. The inscription reads: 'Here awaiting the Resurrection lies the body of Margaret Coulston, the munificent founder of this church. Born 6 September 1823. Died 13 April 1909. May she rest in peace. Amen'. The church continues to offer Mass for her on the day of her death, that it too may be the day of her Resurrection.

Stations of the Cross