

A Short History of St. Augustine of Canterbury's, Manchester

Please Note: St Augustine's is in a part of the City called Chorlton-on-Medlock. More usually, however, it is said to be in 'All Saints' which is a much smaller area and named after the All Saints Church of England Church which once stood in Grosvenor Square but was destroyed in the same night time blitz as the St. Augustine's Church on York Street (see below). Another part of Manchester is called Chorlton-cum-Hardy, and this is often abbreviated to Chorlton. The two Chorlton's are quite distinct and not to be confused.

St. Augustine's Parish is one of the oldest in Manchester, only St. Chad's (1773) and St Mary's in Mulberry Street (1794) are older and the same tireless priest, Fr. Rowland Broomhead, founded all three.

The first Church was built in 1820 on Granby Row, at a time when there were only 500 Catholics in the Manchester District, which included Bolton, Rochdale, Stockport, Glossop and Macclesfield. The "Manchester Historical Recorder" published in 1851, refers to the opening of St. Augustine's in these words, "1820 – St. Augustine's Catholic Church, Granby Row, opened Sept. 27th. Cost £10,000. John Palmer, architect... the Rev. Rowland Broomhead, who for upwards of forty years had been a Catholic Missionary in Manchester, was born August 28th, 1751, and died October 12th. 1820. 'All ranks all parties, and Christians of every denomination respected this good man'. He was buried at St Augustine's". This Church, presbytery and the adjacent cemetery was sold in 1905 to make way for the Manchester Municipal Technical College which in turn became UMIST (University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology) and, from October 2004, now a part of the University of Manchester.

With the money from the sale, a second Church was built on York Street where the Mancunian Way and the National Computer Centre now cross York Street. This Church was finished in 1908 but survived only 32 years as it was destroyed in the Manchester Blitz of Christmas 1940, and Fr. George Street was killed. The collage in one of the side chapels of the current Church is made from the chalices and other sacred vessels crushed in the destruction. Our foundation stone (situated in the Lady Chapel) comes from the York Street Church. The popular artist of Salford and Manchester, L.S. Lowry, painted the scene of the destroyed Church.

Meanwhile, the Holy Family Church, on our present site, was bought from the Welsh Calvinist Methodists back in 1876. The Scots Reformed Presbyterian Church had originally built the Church in 1844, the architect being Edward Nicholson of Manchester: the original cost was £1,600. The Methodists bought the Church from the Presbyterians in the early 1850s. By the mid 1870s Salford Diocese was looking for a site to found a college for the education of Catholic youth. The Chapel was bought to serve as the place of worship for the newly founded St. Bede's College, which was situated on Grosvenor Square. Cardinal Manning preached at the ceremony to mark its opening as a Catholic Chapel. St. Bede's soon outgrew its first buildings on Grosvenor Square and moved to its current site in Alexandra Park, South Manchester, later in the nineteenth century. At this point the Holy Family was erected as a parish in its own right. It remained a parish for only a short time since in 1908 it was amalgamated when the new St. Augustine's was opened: Holy Family became a chapel-of-ease once more. After the Blitz it was left as the only Church in the parish. Canon O'Leary was Parish Priest from 1942-1952 and was succeeded by Canon McClernon.

In 1966 the Holy Family Church, by now showing its age, was demolished and our new Church of St Augustine of Canterbury was built here with money from the War Damage Commission. It was the first Church to be built for the Diocese of Salford since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the reforms of the liturgy that the Council called for were brought into the design and execution of the new Church. The Architects were Desmond Williams and Associates, the Assistant-in-Charge was Mr. V. Lloyd, and Clerk of Works Mr. F. Haley. The Quantity Surveyors were T. Sumner Smith and Partners, the Consulting Engineers were Ove Arup and Partners and the general contractor was Messrs. G. and W. Smith (Builders) Ltd., Manchester. In all, the Church complex took twenty-two months to complete. The cost was £138,000.

The Church was opened on 19 March 1968 and consecrated by Bishop Thomas Holland on 20 October 1970. The other ministers for this ceremony were: Deacon - Rev. J. K. Kenny; Sub-deacon - Rev. E. Fullen; Assistant Campions - Very Rev. Canon O'Leary, D.D., and Very Rev. Canon J. Lakin; Arch-priest - The Rt. Rev. Mgr. C. Egan, V.G.; Choirmaster - The Rev. K. O'Connor; Organist - Miss P. Alston.

The mural behind the Altar, "Christ Sitting in Majesty Over Creation", is the work of the artist Robert Brumby as are other items in the Church including the Ceramic figure in the Baptistry; Ceramic figure of the Holy Family; Ceramic Centre Piece of Last Supper in the High Altar; Ceramic Consecration Crosses; Tabernacle; Six Candle Sticks for High Altar; Acolyte Candlesticks; Processional Cross; Holy Water Fonts, and the montage of remains of sacred vessels rescued from the Blitzed Church.

Details of the Artist: Robert Brumby, Des.R.C.A, born Yorkshire 1934, studied at Hull Regional College of Art and Crafts and Royal College of Art. In charge of Ceramics at York School of Art, 1960-1967. Other work includes Christ in Majesty and Holy Family Group for the Church of the Holy Family in Pontefract; Crucifixion for Hull University Catholic Chaplaincy; Madonna and Child for the Lady Chapel, Liverpool Cathedral.