

St Mary's Cathedral, Middlesbrough

Dalby Way, Coulby Newham, Middlesbrough



Blessed Sacrament Chapel - to the main church

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Listed grade: *Not listed*

1.2 Conservation area: *No*

1.3 Architect: *Swainston Partnership*

1.4 Date(s): *First designs c.1982, built 1985-7*

1.5 Date of visit: *7 November 2007*

1.6 Name of report author: *Geoff Brandwood*

1.7 Name of parish priest and/or contact(s) made on site: *Very Rev. Mgr Ricardo Morgan (Dean)*

1.8 Associated buildings: *Presbytery and church hall*

1.9 Bibliographic references:

Middlesbrough Diocesan Yearbook 2007

Anon., *St. Mary's Cathedral Middlesbrough* ([guidebook], 2006)

Part 2: Analysis

2.1 Statement of Importance

The Cathedral and its associated complex form a large and visually prominent feature in the area and are also of central importance in the life of the diocese. However, they are but twenty years old, and it is probably premature to start making judgements about their historic and aesthetic worth.

2.2 Historical background

The church of St Mary in Sussex Street, Middlesbrough, was built in 1876-8 from designs by Goldie and Child, to replace a previous chapel. It was made the Cathedral in 1879. By the mid-1970s the population exodus from inner Middlesbrough was stimulating ideas of a new Cathedral and in 1976 it was decided to build it at Coulby Newham towards the southern end of the built-up area. The original architect was Frank B. Swainston whose practice had been responsible for the churches of St Andrew, Teesville, St Anne, also Teesville, St Alban, Redcar, and St Bernadette, Nunthorpe. He died in 1982 shortly after the outline design had been prepared and his partner, Peter Fenton, developed the detailed drawings and designed the furnishings. Construction started in 1985 and the building was completed in 1987. The Swainston Partnership was merged in 2000 with DKS Architects of Middlesbrough in 2000.

The original Cathedral was demolished after being severely damaged by fire in 2000.

2.3 Setting

In a new suburb on the south side of the conurbation: the area is one of mixed use and has a good deal of greenery.

2.4 Description of the building and its principal fittings and furnishings

All directions stated are geographic (rather than liturgical).

The complex consists of the Cathedral church itself (oriented south-west) with a presbytery (north-east) and church hall and ancillary facilities (north-west). There is also a campanile attached to the church hall wing. The entrance to the church (on its western side) incorporates a large narthex and a repository. The church can accommodate some 700 people and also has a Blessed Sacrament chapel between it and the sacristy/presbytery.

Construction throughout is in orange-brown brick over a structural steel frame. The church lies under by a low, irregularly-shaped pyramid-like roof, covered like the rest of the buildings, in grey slate. The church roof is fractured into different levels and these differences are exploited by filling them with strips of glazing which, with the kite-shaped window over the altar, form the main illumination for the building. The campanile, the highest structure on the site, makes much use of sheer vertical brick strips and has, attached to it, three bells which can be chimed.

The interior is laid out in accordance with the principles of Vatican II and is a broad fan-shape with a raked floor focusing upon the altar and reredos. There is no internal separation or nor any supports apart from a slender brick pier on either side. The walls are of bare brick. The ceiling presents a series of interlocking plates of varied

geometry which follow the lines of the structural frame. The Blessed Sacrament chapel lies to the left of the sanctuary with a glazed screen between the two (removable for special occasions).

Behind the altar is a tall abstract painted reredos by Bob Brumby which is said to represent resurrection. Right of the sanctuary is an organ in a four-bay Gothic case.