

St Francis of Assisi, Acklam

Levick Crescent, Acklam, Middlesbrough



Part 1: Core data

1.1 Listed grade: *Not listed*

1.2 Conservation area: *No*

1.3 Architect: *Not established, possibly Bishop Shine*

1.4 Date(s): *1935*

1.5 Date of visit: *8 November 2007*

1.6 Name of report author: *Geoff Brandwood*

1.7 Name of parish priest and/or contact(s) made on site: *Mrs Annabelle Sullivan*

1.8 Associated buildings: *Presbytery and parish room*

1.9 Bibliographic references:

Middlesbrough Diocesan Yearbook 2007

www.stfrancisacklam.co.uk

Diocesan archives

Part 2: Analysis

2.1 Statement of Importance

An interwar design in Early Christian-cum-Italianate style, this is a well-composed, generously-scaled building which forms an important local visual focus.

2.2 Historical background

The church of St Francis was one of several built in the 1930s to serve Catholics in Middlesbrough's burgeoning suburbs, in this case areas of the west of Linthorpe, Acklam and Whinney Banks. The design has some very close similarities with St Joseph's, the neighbouring church to the east, also erected in the mid-1930s, and which has been attributed to Bishop Shine. On stylistic grounds, the same architect must surely have been responsible for both. The builder was Mr Frank Spink (his estimated cost was £3,900), who also built the presbytery and school. The parish area originally covered the whole of Acklam, through Brookfield and up to Hemlington but then St Clare's was built in 1967 to relieve pressure on St Francis's.

2.3 Setting

One of Middlesbrough's extensive 1930s housing developments: in this case there is a good deal of open space adjacent on the (geographic) west and north sides.

2.4 Description of the building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The church is oriented south so all directions given are liturgical.

This church consists of a nave, aisles, lower sanctuary, southwest campanile, northeast porch and southeast sacristy. It is designed in Early Christian style with a campanile that incorporates Italianate treatment. The nave has a clerestory with two round-arched windows per bay of the nave. The aisles have one small single, round-arched light per bay. The sanctuary has three single lights on the north and one on the south. The southwest campanile forms the most visually striking exterior feature, built of four unequal stages with the upper two consisting of broad arched tiers where the voids are greater than the solids. It is covered by a low pyramid, leaded roof. There is a traceried, wheel window in the west façade.

Inside the walls are plastered and coloured, mostly, in very pale pink. There is a wide nave with an arcade of five bays to the aisles plus the west gallery bay. The arches are formed of three orders of red brick which rest on capitals of two orders without historical precedent: the circular piers taper slightly as they rise. The aisles are treated, as at St Joseph's with plaster render curves upwards without interruption to meet the nave walls: each bay is divided by a flat pilaster. The chancel arch is similar in its arch details to the nave arcade arches and has imposts. The ceiling is three-sided and the roof trusses seven-sided.

The reredos has a raised central section with a semi-circular head, flanked by lower square panels: it is richly treated with marbles of different colours. The same colouration and materials are used in the pulpit. At the west end there is a gallery which houses the organ. Small Sacred Heart (south) and Lady Chapel (north) altars fill the eastern ends of the aisles.