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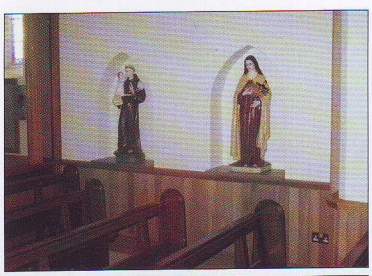
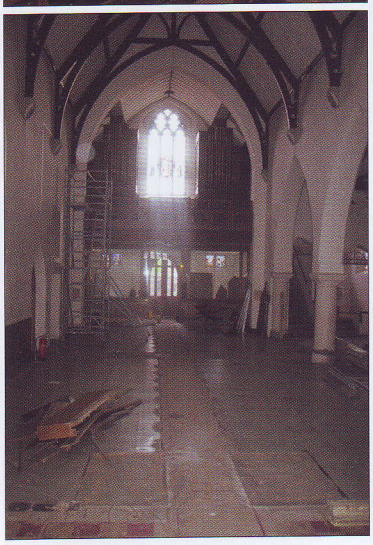
CHURCH building & HERITAGE REVIEW



PROJECT





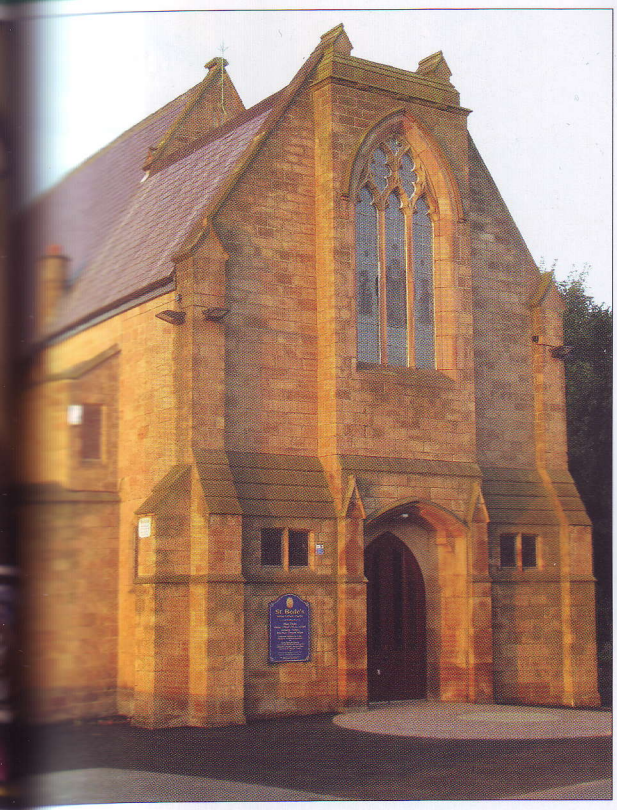



THE RENOVATION OF ST BEDE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ROTHERHAM

St Bede's was opened in 1842. Thus it is one of the oldest Catholic churches in the area. It was extended by the additions of an organ gallery and new main doors, and a side aisle on the (liturgical) north side in the 1930's. Although well maintained down the decades, the church was beginning to show signs of its age and the longevity of its heating system. As in many such buildings electrical wiring had been added with little if any removed. It was time for renovation. The closing of a neighbouring parish and the subsequent sale of land provided the finance.

It was a very tight schedule. Just fourteen weeks were allowed for the project before brides would be knocking on the door to walk down the aisle for their long arranged nuptuals.

The work of renovation was extensive. A new underfloor heating system (provided by Jupiter) was to be laid on the existing floor with a new floor of York stone laid above it. The sanctuary steps were to be rearranged to allow the heating system to run across the sanctuary and maintain the height differential with the body of the church. This would also allow a new marble floor across the sanctuary (installed by Paul Lupton of Bury who had a few years earlier created a new ambo to match the existing fifty year old altar). Laying all this atop the existing floor, rather than excavating saved a little time but meant there would be more external works to maintain access without steps at the main door and the side door. Wiring which had been added to over the decades was to be ripped out and the church re-wired with new lighting and all the required safety features which had been but a dream in the previous one hundred and seventy years of



> The parishioners are delighted with their 'new' church, which retains the atmosphere of the old while looking fresh. Always a loved and lovely church, St Bede's has retained all its qualities but those qualities are shown to much better effect.

the church's life. Remedial work on the plaster, decoration throughout, polishing of the benches and some alteration of the benches in particular to provide a wider central aisle were also required. The church had oak panelling around some of the side walls but this was distressed. It was replaced with English light oak.

The previous heating system was a hot-air blower arrangement through four blowers in the body of the church (and two behind heavy curtains on the sanctuary rendering them useless). The original idea of simply plastering over the recesses was changed to make arched niches for four of the statues which previously had sat atop wooden supports. A recess at the top of the church was altered to house a newly commissioned icon of our Lady of Perpetual Succour (Patron of the diocese of Hallam). >

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PROJECT

PROJECT TEAM

Parish Priest:
Mgr John Ryan

Manager:
Allan Hair,
John Hill Associates,
Doncaster

Contractor:
O&P Construction

Underfloor
Heating System:
Jupiter

Sound System:
Scratch Music

Stained Glass:
Pendle Stained
Glass Ltd

St Bede's
Roman Catholic Church
Station Road
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S60 1HF



The ceilings were to be insulated throughout. Work on the sanctuary ceiling provided a delightful surprise. An original ceiling depicting the night sky and stars, very similar to the sanctuary ceiling in St Marie's RC Church, Sheffield, was revealed. Why it had been covered is not recorded. Some older parishioners claimed they remembered seeing the stars when they were children. The probable time of the cover up would thus be about 1960. The ceiling was repainted and not insulated.

As the work progressed it was recorded in photographs which appeared weekly on the parish's website. Thus parishioners were able to follow the heart-ache of the church ripped apart and the miraculous restoration.





Some time was lost as more plaster was removed than anticipated but soon the work was ahead of schedule. There was daily contact between the parish priest and the excellent clerk of works, ensuring that decisions were quickly taken and action swiftly followed.

It was an enterprise that all those involved appeared to enjoy.

Over the past four years stained glass has been introduced to most of the windows of St Bede's by Pendle Stained Glass. The final two windows were installed towards the end of the contract period. So that when the church was handed back to the parish it was in pristine condition throughout.

The parishioners are delighted with their 'new' church, which retains the atmosphere of the old while looking fresh. The wider aisle gives a sense of space; and the stone floor a sense of venerability. Always a loved and lovely church, St Bede's has retained all its qualities but those qualities are shown to much better effect.

On September 30 we welcomed Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, along with our own Bishop, John Rawsthorne, to preside at Mass to celebrate the reopening of the church and bless the new icon to Our Lady. ■

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