

VCH SHROPSHIRE

Vol. VI (ii), Shrewsbury

Sect. 4.3: Roman Catholicism

History by R. W. Hoyle: architectural descriptions by Wendy Horton

This text is made available to readers in advance of its full publication. We welcome suggestions for improvement, additional references and, of course, we invite readers to point out errors.

The present text takes the history of Roman Catholicism in Shrewsbury to about the time of the Jubilee of the opening of the Cathedral (1906) and the death of Bishop Allen (1908). Some text on the twentieth century history has been drafted and is supplied here, but the main account of twentieth-century Catholicism will follow at a later date.

An architectural description of the Cathedral by Wendy Horton follows the historical account file, the illustrations for which will follow. There is also an account of the mid-twentieth century Catholic churches at Monkmoor and Harlescott.

First public version, October 2023

4.3. Roman Catholicism to c. 1908¹

Neither Shrewsbury nor Shropshire had extensive Catholic populations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Occasional presentments of Catholics resident in the town were made throughout the seventeenth century, but the returns of 1676 found only eight Catholics in the town's four parishes. An estimate of the number of Catholics in the county at the beginning of the eighteenth century suggests that there were just a few more than 1,000. The 1767 return for three of the town parishes gives the names of 32 Catholics.

The Catholic community was supported by two Catholic gentry families. The Berington family had a house in St Alkmund's Square. By October 1740 at the latest they were supporting a Catholic priest, Francis Jakeman (1698-1778) educated at St Omar and Rome, who returned to England in 1728 and was resident in Shrewsbury from about 1731. On the death of William Berington in 1766, Edward Smythe of Acton Burnell appears to have taken the lead. In 1773 one Thomas Bell of Atcham left £500 towards the upkeep of a priest in Shrewsbury. In 1776 Smythe raised funds for the building of a church. A site was procured on Town Walls and a church built at a cost of £390. A priest's house was either adjacent or nearby. The resident priest was James Corne (1745-1817) who was certainly in place by 1782 and perhaps earlier and remained in Shrewsbury until his death. The community remained small and in 1803 Corne reported that his income was small and mostly from money left for masses which he supplemented with a small private income.

The French Revolution brought a small refugee Catholic community to Shrewsbury: one of them, Louis Le Maitre, may have assisted and then succeeded Corne. By 1824 Samuel Jones had taken over the mission. In his time the congregation grew. It numbered about 60 at each mass in the 1820s, but by 1833 it had risen to 111 and by the early 1840s 244. It seems likely that the growth in the congregation came largely from Irish migrants. Jones enlarged the chapel in 1826. He increased its footprint by incorporating a side passage and moving the front of the chapel nearer the road: he also installed a gallery. The front was of stone and stucco surmounted by a plain cross. Henry Pidgeon attended its reopening and wrote warmly of the interior decorations. He was impressed by the music and singing. He noted though that the congregation did not fill the chapel. A chamber organ was installed in 1827.² Under Jones, Mass was said at 10.30 on a Sunday and Vespers on a Sunday afternoon. On the first

¹ The following draws heavily on Peter Phillips, 'Shrewsbury: a Catholic Community', in John P. Marmion (ed.), *Shrewsbury. Millennium essays for a Catholic diocese* (2000), pp. 39-106. Unreferenced material is taken from Phillips.

² SA, 6001/3056 (Henry Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', IV), fos 45r-48r; 6001/3057 ('Salopian Annals', V), fo. 48r.

Sunday of the month, Benediction was also sung. Mass was also offered on Wednesday and Friday. At an unknown date a school was established in a house on Wyle Cop: this moved to the thirteenth-century tower on the Town Walls and then to a site adjacent to the church in 1827.

Whilst Pidgeon could attend the chapel, and the Catholic presence in the town must have become familiar, Shrewsbury itself remained hostile to Catholicism and sent monster petitions against emancipation to Parliament on a number of occasions in 1827-29. At a personal level Jones appears to have been liked, even admired, in the town.

On his death in 1833 Jones was succeeded by an Irish priest, the Rev. Eugene Egan.³ The Catholic population of the town continued to grow placing the chapel under great pressure. An enlargement took place in 1840, and the congregations seems to have grown quickly after the arrival of the railway in Shrewsbury. The religious census of 1851 gives the congregation as 700 including 100 Sunday school scholars.⁴ For a time Egan employed his brother as an auxillary priest so he could offer two masses on Sunday and mass daily, confessions every evening and more frequent instructions in the faith. He complained that whilst there was enough work for two priests, his congregation was also poor. In 1849 he apologised for the delay in collecting money for the bishop's fund, saying that the congregation was collecting clothes for the poor children amongst its member. The chapel was too small for the congregation and the schoolroom for the 70 or 80 children it had to accommodate. In some years the congregation did not cover the costs of the chapel and Egan was paying some of the costs of the school out of his stipend. (Egan said this on several occasions including in his comments to the 1851 census of religious worship.⁵) But as early as 1843 Egan had purchased a site for a new church and had secured a promise from John Talbot, sixteenth earl of Shrewsbury, that he would fund its erection.⁶

It may seem all the more remarkable that Shrewsbury was chosen for the seat of the Roman Catholic diocese when the papacy announced its intention of establishing an English hierarchy in 1850, especially as Shrewsbury lay well to the south in the new diocese. In a revival of earlier anti-Catholic agitations, petitions were launched, meetings convened and a hostile correspondence was carried by the Shrewsbury papers. The church thought it prudent

³ Egan's census return in both 1841 and 1851 gives his birthplace as Ireland (nothing more specific was required by the census). In 1853 Bishop Browne transferred him to Stalybridge. *Eddowes Shrewsbury J.*, 13 July 1853; *Catholic Standard*, 16 July 1853. He died on 21 Dec. 1871 in Bruges (*Eddowes Shrewsbury J.*, 27 Dec. 1871). A window dedicated to his memory was erected in the cathedral. It is now in the chapel of St Winefride's convent.

⁴ Field (ed.), *Church and Chapel in early Victorian Shrewsbury*, p. 80.

⁵ Phillips, pp. 67-8; Field (ed.), *Church and Chapel in early Victorian Shrewsbury*, p. 80.

⁶ *Tablet*, 11 Feb. 1843.

to place a guard around the church on Town Walls. James Brown (1812-81) was consecrated as the first Bishop of Shrewsbury on 27 July 1851 but made his home Salter's Hall in Newport.

Bishop Brown originally intended to build his cathedral in Chester. The earl of Shrewsbury insisted that a church in Shrewsbury had to take priority and offered to support the project to the tune of £3,000 per year for three years. The church had already acquired a garden on Town Walls and subsequently had the donation of the buildings of a school, and its gardens, on Belmont from a convert, Charles Cholmondley. Taken together, this was held to be sufficient ground to make the site for a church although it was too small for an East-West orientation to be achieved. Both Shrewsbury and Pugin died in 1852 and the work passed to Bertram Talbot, seventeenth earl of Shrewsbury, and Pugin's son, Edward Welby Pugin. Work was then delayed because Shrewsbury could not access any money until he came of age on 11 December 1853. On the following day Bishop Brown laid the foundation stone of his cathedral.⁷ This prompted another outbreak of anti-Catholic sentiment in the town. A celebratory procession as forbidden out of fears that it would encourage a counter procession and prompt violent clashes. The party, which in a sneering and hostile account, was said to number less than 100, moved to a celebratory luncheon in the Lion Hotel.

The twin dedication to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and St Peter of Alcantara was Shrewsbury's choice although the former was amended to Our Lady Help of Christians at the suggestion of Pius IX.

Once building had started, it was discovered that the ground would not stand the weight of the projected tower and spire and the church which emerged was smaller than envisaged. Bishop Brown toyed with the idea of a metropolitan church in Birkenhead but that was abandoned in 1855: then it was hoped that a further church could be built in Shrewsbury which would serve as a Cathedral. Shrewsbury did not live to see the church he largely paid for, dying on 10 August 1856. The Cathedral was opened on 29 October 1856 but was only consecrated in 1891.⁸ Bishop Brown continued to live at Salter's Hall until 1868 when he moved to a house in Belmont, as had been envisaged 15 years before.

The Roman Catholic community achieved a degree of acceptance in the town in the last decades of the century largely through Samuel Webster Allen (1844-1908). Allen came to Shrewsbury as secretary to Bishop Brown in 1870 having been a stenographer at the Vatican

⁷ SC, 16 Dec. 1853.

⁸ SC, 31 Oct. 1856 where a detailed account of the church can be found. (The copy in BNA is overexposed and illegible.)

Council. He was consecrated bishop in 1897. Prior to his elevation, he played a prominent role in the public life of the town including as an elected member and vice-chair of the Shrewsbury school board and of the Atcham Poor Law Guardians. For a period he served as a magistrate. Acceptance of the Catholic community is shown by the fact that the town's officers, led by the mayor, processed from Shire Hall to the Cathedral to attend the laying of a foundation stone for the new school on Town Walls in 1891.⁹ There seems to have been genuine regret when, after his appointment, Bishop Allen resigned his public offices.¹⁰ It was reported at his funeral in 1908 that many poor people lined the route of the procession, for the bishop had 'always been a warm friend to the poor people of the town'.¹¹

⁹ *Eddowes's Shrewsbury J.*, 22 Apr. 1891; *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 24 Apr. 1891. The latter did carry a letter of complaint about the mayor's attendance signed 'A Bigoted Protestant'.

¹⁰ SC, 23 Apr. 1897.

¹¹ SC, 22 May 1908.

Twentieth-century history [to be continued]

*Post-war expansion*¹²

As with the other Shrewsbury churches, the spread of suburbs to the north of Shrewsbury from the 1930s offered possibilities as well as necessitating new provision. As early as 1945 one of the cathedral clergy had arranged for mass to be said at St Michael's Infant School in Ditherington. Whilst fund-raising for a new church here took place in the 1950s, the ambition to build was leapfrogged by the decision to form a new parish with a church in Monkmoor. St Winefrede on Crowmere Road was opened in 1956. A new church in Harlescott on Meadow Farm Drive, dedicated to Our Lady of Pity and which fulfilled the earlier plans, was opened in 1961. Until 1971 St Winefride's was supplied by the cathedral clergy and it was only in that year that it secured its own priest.

*The convent of the sisters of Mercy*¹³

A convent of the sisters of Mercy was established in Shrewsbury in 1868 at the invitation of Bishop Brown, its initial members being drawn from the convent at Bilston. Initially the nuns lived in spartan conditions in the school house from where they carried out their usual duties of teaching, visiting the sick and giving instruction when called upon. In 1872 they moved to a house in Belmont purchased for them by the bishop. They were able to purchase the adjacent property in 1881. As this was the site of the medieval College of St Chad, it in turn became known as The College. In the following years they also enlarged their income by opening a fee-paying school.

The acquisition of more property allowed the nuns to open a 'Home' of 'House of Mercy' with a laundry to train poor and orphaned girls and prepare them for employment. The Home continued to operate until 1947 when it closed for want of applicants but the laundry operated on a commercial basis to 1965. The convent continued to acquire property in the College Court to the point where (by 1986) they owned the whole court except for one

¹² *History of the Diocese of Shrewsbury*, p. 25.

¹³ The following is based on Phillips, pp. 90-92; *History of the Diocese of Shrewsbury*, pp. 24-5.

solicitor's office. The duties of the nuns continued to be teaching (and catechising), hospital, prison and other visiting.

The convent celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2018.¹⁴

*Schools*¹⁵

The provision of schooling on by the church on Town Walls predates the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in 1868. They took over the school in the summer of that year on the retirement of the headmistress, a Mrs Lyons. An extension to the school was made in 1878 but proved to be inadequate to need.¹⁶ By the time that a new building was erected in 1891, there was an infant's school, St Joseph's and a school for older children, St Mary's.¹⁷ The former appears to have become subsumed in the latter. The directory for 1891 reported that St Mary's was managed by the convent, was mixed and had provision for 120 boys and 100 infants: the average attendance was 101 and 83 respectively. The 1895 directory reports that the rebuilt school could accommodate 300, 120 boys and 100 infants, but average attendance was 100 and 96. The school erected in 1891 was voluntary and so loosely under the control of the School Board. By 1917 the school had 130 mixed pupils and 201 infants.

In January 1946 St Mary's infants was combined with the senior and junior departments of the Cathedral school. The amalgamated school was called St Mary's R. C. School and had pupils from 3 to 14 years of age. In 1957 it had 335 children on its role (81 infants, 170 juniors and 84 seniors). Overcrowding was a problem and in January 1957 the infants moved to buildings in the convent grounds. In 1963 the school was reorganised: the senior pupils now became students at the Blessed Robert Johnson Secondary Modern School at Wellington. The infants returned to the school buildings on Town Walls which made a school of 192 pupils, two infant classes and four junior classes.

The need for a school on a new site was acknowledged. As early as 1950 land in Castlefields had been purchased but the building of the school was persistently delayed. It only opened to pupils in September 1970. It is now known as Shrewsbury Cathedral Catholic Primary School. The 1891 buildings on Town Walls were demolished in 1987 and the site redeveloped.

¹⁴ <https://www.sistersofmercyunion.org.uk/st-winefrides-convent-of-mercy-celebrates-150-years/>

¹⁵ The following draws on N. D. Jenkins. '100 years of Education at St Mary's R. C. School, Shrewsbury' (ts, 1978), a copy of which I owe to father Phillips.

¹⁶ DA5/7/10/1/36; 1/56

¹⁷ For arrangements in 1891 see the reports of the laying of the foundation stone for the new school; SC 24 Apr. 1891; *Eddowes Shrewsbury J.* 15, 22 Apr. 1891.

The convent also established a fee-paying school in Belmont which is the lineal ancestor of St Winefride's Roman Catholic Independent school, a primary school which continues to operate in 2023.

The Council House was offered for auction in 1933 and adopted as his residence by Bishop Moriarty on his appointment to the see in 1934. It continued to be used as the bishop's residence into the 1980. Bishop Gray found the location of the house inconvenient and moved to Bidston. The house was offered at auction in 1984 and disposed of by the diocese.¹⁸

¹⁸ *History of the Diocese of Shrewsbury*, p. 25; SA, SC 5/16 (1933); 15/12 (1983).

Architectural descriptions

Shrewsbury: Roman Catholic Chapel

The first purpose-built Roman Catholic chapel was constructed in 1776, two years before the penal constraints on Catholic worship were lifted. It was located on the north side of Town Walls, close to the junction with Back-lane (now Belmont Bank), a steep narrow lane leading towards Belmont.¹⁹

Owen and Blakeway noted that the chapel was being enlarged (c.1825) under the direction of the newly-appointed priest, Revd Samuel Jones.²⁰ Henry Pidgeon attended the opening of the enlarged and beautified chapel on 4 October 1826. It had a spacious gallery formed by reducing the size of the adjoining priest's house and there was accommodation for 300 people. The stuccoed entrance front, including a porch, had been brought closer to the street, the former chapel having been inconspicuous. Pidgeon approved of the internal decoration undertaken by John Carline, mason, particularly the ceiling. The new altar had an unfinished painting on the front panel, a representation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* by Mr Corbett, a local artist. On top of the altar was a gilded tabernacle surmounted by a crucifix. This new altar replaced a former altar piece of leather, with gilding and chequered decoration, cherubs, a star and central crucifixion. Pidgeon reported a continuous sanctuary rail across the interior.²¹

An illustration in a graingerized volume of Owen and Blakeway's *History* depicts the chapel, probably that described by Pidgeon (Fig 1). The stuccoed front is in simple classical style with a central square porch with parapets reached by stone steps. It is flanked by square-headed windows, the gallery lit by round-headed windows. Attached to the raised gable is a tablet bearing a cross, and adjoining to the right is the tall 3-storey priest's house.²²

A fine organ by Parsons of London was installed in October 1827, its opening celebrated by a high mass, sermons and much vocalisation. The collection raised £23 towards its cost.²³

¹⁹ Peter Phillips, 'Shrewsbury, a Catholic community, 1750-1920', in J. P. Marmion (ed.), *Shrewsbury. Millennium essays for a Catholic diocese* (2000), p. 46.

²⁰ Owen and Blakeway, II, (1825), 476.

²¹ SA, 6001/3056 (Henry Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', IV), fos 45r-48r; Phillips, 'Catholic Community', pp. 57-8.

²² SA, 6833/9, vol. I, opp. 476.

²³ SA, 6001/3057 (Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', V), fo. 48r.

A plan of Shrewsbury published by Charles Hulbert in 1830 shows the Catholic chapel. It is also labelled as such on John Wood's map of 1838, marked as the second building from the junction with Back-lane.²⁴ (Fig. 2)

The congregation grew substantially during the early 19th century in part because of the influx of Irish migrant labour. A small school was established which was taught in the medieval tower on the Town Walls: it was moved into the chapel complex in December 1827. The chapel was enlarged again in c.1840 when the girls' accommodation was converted into a gallery, but in 1841 Bishop Walsh reported that the chapel was too small and that a larger church was called for.²⁵

Cathedral Church of Our Lady and St Peter of Alcantara

When the English hierarchy was restored in September 1850, Shrewsbury was regarded as a suitable place for a See, with James Brown consecrated first Bishop in July 1851. This was an honour for the community's patron, John Talbot, sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury. Talbot was undertaking a major redevelopment of his principal residence, Alton Towers in Staffordshire, and had employed the prominent Gothic architect, A.W.N. Pugin. In 1852, the pair were discussing plans for a new cathedral in Shrewsbury, the Earl stating that work could start in Spring 1853, continuing for three years at a total cost of £9,000.²⁶

Both the earl and Pugin died in 1852. The former's nephew, 19-year-old Bertram, became seventeenth Earl, whilst Pugin's eldest son, Edward, aged 18, took over the project.²⁷

A plot of land on the north side of Town Walls, one of the gardens of the town houses on Belmont and c.200 yds west of the former chapel, was purchased. The foundation stone was laid by Bishop Brown on 11 December 1853, the day after the new Earl reached the age of majority, at a projected cost of over £10,000. Edward Pugin's ambitious design is shown in a watercolour, exhibited first at the Royal Academy, and now in the possession of the cathedral (Fig. 3). The picture shows a tall Gothic building with prominent southwest tower and spire, aligned north-south in accordance with the street layout, rather than east-west as proposed by his father.²⁸ The exterior was to be of white sandstone in Early Decorated (geometrical) style, the interior of Bath and Caen stone and large enough for 1,000 persons. The nave, aisles,

²⁴ SA, PR/2419: Plan of Shrewsbury, published by C. Hulbert (1830); SA, 3551/3: Map of Shrewsbury, John Wood (1838).

²⁵ Phillips, 'Catholic Community', pp. 62, 64.

²⁶ Phillips, 'Catholic Community', 68-9, 73-4.

²⁷ Michael Fisher, *Puginland. A. W. N. Pugin, Lord Shrewsbury and Staffordshire* (2002), 145-6;

²⁸ *The Builder*, 24 Dec. 1853, 723; Phillips, 'Catholic Community', pp. 76-9; SA, xls23870.

chancel and lateral chapel were to be dominated by the spire rising to 227 ft. Edward Pugin used some of his father's craftsmen, including John Hardman, metallurgist and later stained glass maker of Birmingham.²⁹

On excavating the foundations, the builders found soft sand, which meant the proposed tower and spire had to be abandoned for structural reasons and the scale of the cathedral reduced. The final dimensions of the nave were 69 x 28 ft, whilst the aisles were 11 ft wide. The building was constructed by Richard Wullon, a Catholic builder from Wolverhampton, at a cost of c.£4,000. and opened in October 1856.³⁰

*The Exterior*³¹

The building was constructed of Grinshill sandstone with Bath stone dressings under steeply-pitched tiled roofs, the detail in geometrical-style with foiled shapes and cusped lights. The tall nave of 5-and-a-half-bays has a clerestorey and lean-to aisles and supports a prominent west bellcote, whilst the chancel is lower and narrower. On its north side is a small gabled chapel, remodelled by Joseph Pippet of Hardman and Co. in 1885 as a memorial to Bishop Brown and dedicated to the Sacred Heart.³² (Figs 4 and 5)

The cathedral is shown in an early-twentieth century post-card rising above the surrounding buildings and the fall towards the River Severn. In the gable end fronting Town Walls was the pointed-arched entrance with decorative capitals, approached by two flights of steps. Above was the 6-light west window with convex-sided triangular light under the arch. The west front has narrow angle buttresses, and on the apex are four long corbels supporting a gabled bell-cote. The post-card shows a symmetrical arrangement with 3-light traceried windows to the aisle ends.³³ (Fig. 6)

The theme of convex-sided triangular lights continues in the clerestorey, the five windows with alternating trefoils and cinquefoils. The aisles have wide 3-light windows not aligned with those in the clerestorey, whilst at the west end are single lancets to the clerestorey and north aisle. The chancel is lit by a large 7-light east window with decorated wheel under the arch, and 3-light windows to the north and south sides. The gabled Sacred

²⁹ *The Builder*, 24 Dec. 1853, 723; Roderick O'Donnell, *The Pugins and the Catholic Midlands* (2002), 2.

³⁰ *The Builder*, 8 Nov. 1856, 608; Phillips, 'Catholic Community', 80, 84. For Wullon (who was declared bankrupt in 1858 and fled abroad), see <http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/catholics/jq21.htm>.

³¹ Although the cathedral is oriented north-south, liturgical compass points are used in this account, with the chancel facing east.

³² <https://www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/history/>; *The Builder*, 8 Nov. 1856, 608; Phillips, 'Catholic community', 86.

³³ SA, PC/S/12/C/1/9; *The Builder*, 8 Nov. 1856, 608; Historic England, List no. 1270562, grade II*.

Heart chapel to the north, remodelled in 1885, has a high east window with wheel lighting the altar, and a triangular window to the north, overlooking the aisle.³⁴

There are several later additions, the finest of which is St Winefride's chapel adjoining the south side of the chancel, by Edmund Kirby, architect, of Liverpool. His drawings, dated 9 January 1890, were approved by the Borough of Shrewsbury Improvement Committee in July 1890. The chapel was not built until 1901 following a donation from Mr and Mrs Burke. The chapel has a polygonal apse and conical roof at the east end with 2-light traceried windows to each face, a large west wheel window and spirelet at the corner.³⁵ (Fig. 7)

In 1906 Kirby added a gabled stone porch to the main entrance. It was reported that its primary purpose was to add structural stability to the building on its (geographical) south side but it also served to celebrate the golden jubilee of the opening of the cathedral.³⁶ It is visible in early-20th century photographs with heavy cusping to the entrance arch (Fig 8). The raised gable above is surmounted by an ornate 4-sided canopy, inside which is a figure of Our Lady carved in Mansfield stone, and to the sides are pairs of 2-light windows. Kirby is also said to have added the south west porch, though it may have been built in two parts: The L-shaped gabled structure has a moulded entrance arch fronting the road under a pierced cinquefoil. Steps rise to an ante-room leading into the south aisle, with hipped roof, parapets pierced by open quatrefoils and narrow lancets.³⁷

A large single-storey vestry with crenellated parapets wraps around part of the north aisle and Sacred Heart chapel, and is probably mid-20th century, possibly replacing the cloister said to have linked the cathedral with the priest's residence. It has a wide planked door reached by sandstone steps and narrow lancets (see Fig 5).³⁸

In 2015-16, the main west porch was altered by Andrew Arrol, architect, of Shrewsbury. The lower half of the entrance arch was blocked and new arches were inserted into the sides, which were approached by York stone steps buttressed by substantial walls. (see Fig 4.)³⁹

³⁴ <https://www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/history/>; Philips, 'Catholic community', 86.

³⁵ SA, DA/5/710/14/14; Newman & Pevsner, 533;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_Edmund_Kirby; Philips, 'Catholic community', 86-7.

³⁶ *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 2 Nov. 1906.

³⁷ Newman & Pevsner, 533; Historic England, 1270562; SA, PH/S/13/T/2/61-2;

<https://www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/history/>; Phillips, 'Catholic Community', 87.

³⁸ *The Builder*, 8 Nov. 1856, 608: The priest lived at Cathedral House, 11 Belmont; Newman & Pevsner, 533; SA, PH/S/13/T/2/62.

³⁹ pa.shropshire.gov.uk:15/03737/FUL, inc. drawings by Arrol and Snell, 2015; Google street view, July 2016; <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/shrewsbury-cathedral-church-of-our-lady-help-of-christians-and-st-peter-of-alcantara/>.

The Interior

The chamber has 5-bay nave arcades, the slender octagonal piers with pronounced foliage capitals and moulded pointed arches. Below the clerestory windows is a string course incorporating decorative corbels which support long wall posts. Arched braces to the open timber roof spring from these. The east bays are slightly narrower, beyond which is the tall pointed chancel arch with narrow mouldings. Towards the east of both aisles are triple pointed-arched recesses including confessionals. Further east on the north side is a pointed-arched door leading to the vestry. The bay in front of the chancel is laid with encaustic tiles. Half-lit double doors under a quatrefoil lead from the south aisle into the south west porch. In the north west corner was the baptistry, floor tiles marking the former position of the font (Figs 9, 10).

A major re-ordering was undertaken in 1984-5 by Richard O'Mahony and Partners, but this was partly reversed during restorations by Bishop Mark Davies from 2019. The west gallery with wood-panelled front had been altered when the main porch was added in 1906-7. Beneath is a half-lit wooden screen with doors forming a vestibule, inserted in 2015-16 as part of the later porch alterations. Inside the vestibule is a small shouldered doorway leading to the gallery, whilst there are stoups inside and out (see Fig 9).⁴⁰

Chancel

There are two steps up to the chancel which has a panelled wagon roof with gothic-style painted motifs in red and gold (Fig. 11). A fine gothic-style mosaic floor with coloured geometrical designs is by Joseph Pippet, the floor being uncovered during the restorations of 2019. Found beneath the whitewash were the original hand-painted wall designs by Pippet, early-20th century photographs showing their full extent. Under the east window is a highly ornate reredos of Caen stone by Lane & Lewis of Birmingham. In the centre is a figure of Christ on a gilded tabernacle raised up on a stone pedestal, flanked by pairs of niches with pointed-arched canopies with tall finials, including two angels playing musical instruments. Inside the niches are stone figures representing biblical scenes, whilst beneath are blue and yellow encaustic tiles by Henry Minton. Hanging from the roof is an ornate rood of painted and gilded ironwork dating from 1885.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Newman & Pevsner, 533; pa.shropshire.gov.uk: 15/03737/FUL.

⁴¹ Newman & Pevsner, 533; Historic England, 1270562; *The Builder*, 8 Nov 1856, 608; Lane and Lewis also made the font and the original altar; SA, PC/S/12/C/1/4, PH/S/13/T/2/64-8; Phillips, 'Catholic Community', 86; <https://www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/history/>.

Sacred Heart Chapel

Left of the chancel arch is a narrow pointed arch leading into the Sacred Heart chapel, remodelled by Joseph Pippet. A similar arch at the east end has narrow shafts and foliage capitals, incorporating a geometrical-style window over a tripartite gilded and coloured reredos with biblical scenes. In front is a 3-panel altar in similar style with painted figures, and on the wall to the right, a piscina. There are encaustic floor tiles and a coloured panelled roof, whilst the south side is open to the chancel with inserted open timber screen. Wall paintings were previously visible (Fig 12).⁴²

St Winefride's Chapel

This highly ornate south chapel, designed in 1890 by Edmund Kirby, is characterised by detached black marble shafts with foliage capitals. There are two pairs to the west entrance, supporting arches with pronounced cusping and with a quatrefoil band to the soffit. Two tiers of detached shafts surround the polygonal apse forming a series of niches, including sedilia, which have pointed cusped heads decorated with foliage, figures and heads. The windows are set back behind the upper arcading. On the north side is an unglazed traceried window pre-dating the chapel, the arcading beneath open to the chancel (fig 13).⁴³

Furnishings

The font was designed by Edward Pugin and carved by Lane and Lewis in 1856 with metalwork by Hardman and Co. It was a gift of the Countess of Shrewsbury in memory of her husband, the sixteenth earl, and Bertram Talbot, seventeenth earl. It consists of an octagonal bowl of Caen stone on coloured marble shafts. Each face has a recessed quatrefoil set in fretwork, the quatrefoils containing a carving in relief or inscribed metal plate in an alternating pattern. The font was moved from the baptistry to the south east nave during the re-ordering of 1984-5, but was moved again in 2015-16 to a position in front of the west entrance.⁴⁴

Set in the front angles of the chancel arch are tall wooden statue niches with ornate gilded canopies, containing statues of Our Lady to the left and Saint Joseph to the right. On the west side of the chancel is the Bishop's throne of 1899, a high seat of carved wood, which was much reduced in 1984-5.⁴⁵

⁴² SA, PH/S/13/T/2/69; <https://www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/history/>.

⁴³ Newman & Pevsner, 533; SA, DA/5/710/14/14; SA, PH/S/13/T/2/70, 83, 86; Historic England, 1270562.

⁴⁴ Newman & Pevsner, 533; Phillips, 'Catholic community', 86; pa.shropshire.gov.uk: 15/03737/FUL, 2015.

⁴⁵ Phillips, 'Catholic community', 62; SA, PH/S/13/T/2/81 (photograph showing the original throne).

The organ from the former chapel, by Parsons of London, was moved to the new cathedral where it remained until 1974. It was replaced by a larger organ by Noel Mander of London, which is situated on the gallery. The smaller organ was moved to Mainstone church near Bishop's Castle.⁴⁶

Mounted on the walls of the nave are the stations of the cross, 1954, by Philip Lindsey Clark, a memorial to Bishop Moriarty. The square grey stone tablets are carved in relief with inscriptions and gilding. The former stations, a gift of Charles Cholmondeley of Hodnet, were moved to Wythenshawe church.⁴⁷

During the re-ordering of 1984-5 by Richard O'Mahony & Partners, the altar rails, altar and pulpit were removed. Parquet wooden flooring was laid in the nave, whilst wooden chairs replaced pews. Following the uncovering of the chancel floor tiles in 2019, a free-standing altar of alabaster with red marble inset panel was brought from Ely Cathedral in 2022.⁴⁸

Stained Glass

There are several windows by Hardman and Co., including the colourful east window of 1862 with central Virgin and child in Glory. It was a gift of Charles Cholmondeley who is represented in a blue cloak with his coat of arms. In the south aisle is a window in memory of Miss Florence Burd (d. 1900), by Joseph Pippet of Hardman's, which cost her executors £65. It shows Virgin and child in the centre flanked by saints, with angels in the upper tracery. The east window of Sacred Heart chapel has a wheel with risen Christ surrounded by angels, probably also by Pippet.⁴⁹

There is a fine collection of windows by the Shrewsbury-born stained glass artist, Margaret Rope (1882-1953), undertaken from 1906. The largest is the west window, the six lights depicting British martyrs, which replaced a window by Alphage and (Gabriel) Pippet. A window in the south aisle showing the Visitation is dedicated to Cecilia Davies (d. 1911), a local parishioner. The lancet in the former baptistry has the theme of water and blood and is a memorial to Bishop Brown's housekeeper, Elizabeth Mary de Souza (d. 1907). It replaced a window dedicated to Canon Eugene Egan (d. 1871) which was moved to the chapel of St Winefride's Convent in Belmont. The Soldier window in the north wall of Sacred Heart

⁴⁶ SA, xls23870; Phillips, 'Catholic community', 62.

⁴⁷ Newman & Pevsner, 533; Phillips, 'Catholic community', 86; SA, xls23870. For Cholmondeley, see Phillips, 'Catholic community', 76.

⁴⁸ Newman & Pevsner, 533; SA, xls23870; <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/shrewsbury-cathedral-church-of-our-lady-help-of-christians-and-st-peter-of-alcantara/>.

⁴⁹ Newman & Pevsner, 533; *The Builder*, 8 Nov 1856, 608; SA D3651/B/39/4/1-2: Receipt for window dedicated to Miss F. Burd; Phillips, 'Catholic community', 86.

chapel is a memorial to Eugene Sidney Cox who died in 1917, aged 20 (Fig 14), the former window also moved to the convent. Rope produced two windows for the chancel, a memorial to Sarah Ann Moriarty (d. 1915) to the south, and to the north, a window celebrating the Eucharistic Congress of 1921, a crowd of people including her father, Dr Henry Rope. Her last window is in the vestry and depicts St Ambrose, a memorial to Bishop Moriarty.⁵⁰

Exterior

A forecourt wall of coursed sandstone with raked copings and low buttresses is located left of the cathedral front, an original feature containing a narrow lych-gate with steeply-pitched leaded roof. There was a similar wall with iron railings between the main and south west porches before the main entrance was altered in 2015-16. The latter project included the installation of metal balustrading and gates with a quatrefoil design (see fig 4). Further left, the car park was extended and a café constructed at the back, which involved replacing a basement extension to the rear of 11-12 Belmont. The rear entrance to the cathedral in Belmont was provided with new double metal gates in the same quatrefoil design with balustrading on the brick flanking walls.⁵¹

⁵⁰ SA xls20772: Roger Hall, *Letting in the Light of Christ: Margaret Rope and her Shrewsbury Cathedral Windows* (2008): This book provides a detailed account; Newman & Pevsner, 533; Phillips, 'Catholic community', 86.

⁵¹ SA, PH/S/13/T/2/63; pa.shropshire.gov.uk: 15/03737/FUL, 2015; Google street view, 2015-22.

St Winefride's Church, Monkmoor

St Winefride's church was designed by Francis Xavier Velarde, architect of Liverpool, in 1956 (fig 15). Located in the angle of Crowmere Road and Belvidere Road, with car park and landscaping surrounded by iron railings, the west end is liturgically east. It consists of a nave and chancel in one, the chancel with an apsidal end, with a lower, narrower porch to the west. Linked to the south side is a square campanile, whilst there is a gabled vestry to the north, joined by the presbytery, now a private residence. The building is of brown brick under shallow concrete-tiled roofs. The chamber has five bays divided by low raked buttresses and small round-arched lights in pairs, except to the clerestory where they are single. The windows have patterned metal glazing including semi-circles, and between the lights are pre-cast concrete mullions with alternating depictions of angels and doves. The wood-panelled doors in the south side of the porch are under a cusped head with sandstone tympanum carved with fleur-de-lis motifs. There are similar round-headed panelled doors into the link corridor. The chancel has tall 3 x 4 pane windows to each side, the panes with alternating round and square heads. Attached to the link is the square campanile, of brick except for a stone-faced bell-stage with large round-headed louvres, under a pyramidal copper-sheet roof with bronze cross. The interior is of unpainted brick with low round arches dividing the bays, characteristic of Velarde's work. There are round-arched doorways, blue coloured glazing and the same pre-cast concrete mullions as on the exterior. The painted boarded ceilings have decorative blue and gold designs. In the chancel is a stone altar with incised gilded decoration and a gilded crucifix mounted on the wall behind. ⁵²

Our Lady of Pity Church, Harlescott

Our Lady of Pity Church was designed by Francis Xavier Velarde, and was constructed by his partnership in 1961, a year after his death (fig 16). It has many stylistic similarities with St Winefride's church in Monkmoor. The church occupies a triangular site between Meadow Farm Drive and Meadow Close and is surrounded by grass and iron railings. The dedication is after a medieval 'Pieta' in Battlefield church, a sculpture of Our Lady holding the dead body of Christ in her lap. The single-chamber 5-bay church with apsidal chancel is constructed of brown brick under shallow concrete-tiled roofs. There is a linked polygonal

⁵² <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/shrewsbury-our-lady-of-pity/>; Historic England, 1416160: Listed grade II; Newman and Pevsner, 592.

campanile to the south, a lower gabled porch at the west end and gabled vestry to the north. Detail includes raked buttresses between the bays and square 4-pane windows, the panes with alternating square and round heads. There are entrances to each side of the porch, double wooden doors with diagonal ribs under cusped heads with carved sandstone tympana. There are tall 3 x 4 pane windows on each side of the chancel. Round-headed doors lead into the link attached to the polygonal brick campanile, the stone-faced bell stage with two tiers of diagonal louvres under a steep copper-sheet roof with bronze cross. The nave interior is of unpainted brick with low round arches dividing the bays and round-headed doors, whilst the chancel is plastered with a boarded pine ceiling. Mounted on the east wall above the decorated concrete altar is a reproduction of the Battlefield 'Pieta' in reconstituted limestone, by Herbert Tyson Smith, sculptor of Liverpool, a collaborator of Velarde.⁵³

⁵³ <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/shrewsbury-our-lady-of-pity/>; Newman and Pevsner, 591.