Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH, SKERTON

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The early history of formal places of Catholic worship in Lancaster is described in Guide 57 in this series, which outlines the lead-up to the opening of St Peter's Church in 1859. It became St Peter's Cathedral in 1924. However, the doubling of Lancaster's population in the second half of the nineteenth century required another Catholic church – hence St Joseph's Church in Skerton.

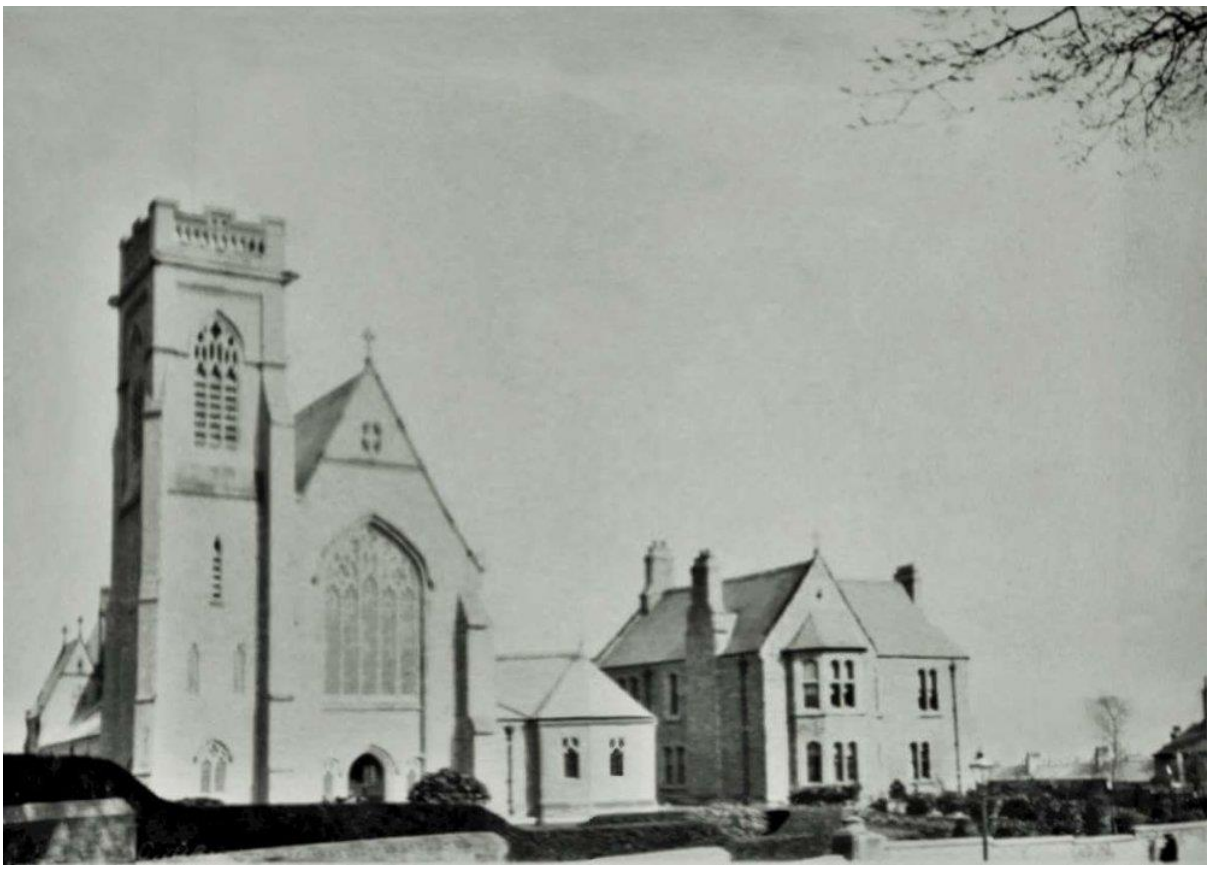
Thomas Coulston was a major benefactor for St Peter's and Margaret Coulston (1823–1909) played a similar role for St Joseph's. The Coulston family acquired their wealth from, first, the leather trades and, later, from their landholdings around Lancaster, the Lancaster & Preston Railway Company and from banking.

Margaret's cousin, John, was the manager of the Lancaster Banking Company for 24 years. Anne Coulston, probably another of Margaret's cousins, co-founded St Mary's Church in Bolton-le-Sands. When Margaret's former house – she gave it to the Sisters of Nazareth – was taken over by Lancaster Corporation for the site of the new Town Hall on Dalton Square, she helped the sisters to acquire the land and build Nazareth House on Ashton Road (1902), which is now a care home.



Margaret Coulston (centre). (Source: *Lancaster Guardian*, gratefully acknowledged)

Margaret built her new home on Slyne Road in Skerton in 1898, which became, after her death, the Presbytery of St Joseph's Church. Building the church began in 1900 and it opened in 1901.



St Joseph's Church and the Presbytery soon after it opened in 1901. The mature trees around the Church preclude this view today.
(Source: St Joseph's Church website, gratefully acknowledged)

The architect was Peter Paul Pugin (1851–1904), the youngest son of the better known Augustus W N Pugin. Peter Pugin's work was largely in the Archdiocese of Glasgow but there were some in North-West England (Warrington, Cleator and Workington). His Lancashire churches include ones in Thornton, Blackpool, Bamber Bridge and St Mary's in Morecambe.

St Joseph's is Perpendicular Gothic Revival in style with curving tracery in the West window and others. The design is complex and colourful throughout. You often see representations of flowers and foliage. The Baptistery (on your right as you enter) is octagonal and rich in symbolism on the gates, ceiling and stained glass. The High Altar is carved Caen sandstone in a High Gothic style and commemorates the life of St Joseph. The wall paintings beside the High Altar are the work of Elphege Pippet with whom Pugin often worked. Hardman of Birmingham, another of his trusted subcontractors, created the stained glass in the Sanctuary. Other stained glass may be by Shrigley and Hunt of Lancaster. Gillow of Lancaster provided the woodwork – the 14 Stations of the Cross, the Pulpit and the parquetry flooring in the Sanctuary, as well as furnishings for Margaret Coulston's house (now the Presbytery).

When you visit the Church do look out for the Pascal Candelabrum, the Lady Chapel and the Sacred Heart Chapel. Nearby is a Convent, St Joseph's Primary School and the church's allotment.

Margaret Coulston was buried in front of the west entrance to the Church, marked by a cross.



The Rood Cross, High Altar and wall paintings
(Source: St Joseph's Church website, gratefully acknowledged)

Further information and an online guide at:
St Joseph's RC Church (st-josephs.church)

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