

***The church forms part of a modernist monastery complex begun in 1940 by Dom Constantine Bosschaerts, a pioneer of twentieth-century Catholic liturgical reform. It was intended to become a parish hall once a larger permanent church had been built. Although the complex was never completed, it has historical significance as an early manifestation in England of the influence of the continental Liturgical Movement; architecturally the design is deliberately functional, and the interior somewhat altered.***

The parish was founded in 1936 by Dom Constantine Bosschaerts OSB (1899-1950), a Belgian Olivetan Benedictine monk who was a friend and associate of Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII. Both men were involved in the establishing of the Vita et Pax Foundation, which embodied ideas of Christian unity, and both shared radical ideas about the renewal of the liturgy. Fr Bosschaerts encouraged the placing of altars away from the eastern wall, with the priest facing the congregation, and the use of the vernacular in the Mass. He first gave expression to these ideas in the reordering of the priory church of Regina Pacis at Schotenhof in Flemish Belgium. He came to England in 1922 to establish a branch of Vita et Pax in Eccleshall, Staffordshire, and went on to establish branches at Rochester and Cockfosters in 1936. The *Catholic Herald* for 28 March 1941 carried an interview with Bosschaerts, where he set out his vision for a large new monastery at Cockfosters with a church to seat 1,000 'built behind the present one which has already attracted much attention on account of its unique design which is due to Fr Bosschaerts himself'. Plans from sketches by Fr Bosschaerts, showing one of several designs, were published in *The Architectural Review* in 194. These indicated cells and classrooms built around a large cloister or courtyard to the east of the proposed church, and communal rooms such as the library and refectory grouped around a smaller courtyard to the north. The building shown at figure 2 would eventually become the parish hall, but would serve as a church pending the building of the permanent church.

Fr Bosschaerts died in 1950 with his ambitious plans largely unrealised, but part of his vision (though not the large new church) was fulfilled by one of his confreres Dom Placis Meylink (1926-2003) who oversaw the building of the monastery guesthouse, the development of the Benedictine Centre for Spirituality, a Christian Meditation Centre and in 1995 a new monastery building.

In January 2012 it was announced that the Olivetan Benedictines would be leaving Cockfosters.

The construction is of reinforced concrete with facings of white brick and concrete detailing. The church occupies part of one range of the original austere modern L-shaped building and presents towards the road a band of continuous windows at low level (originally metal casements with red painted frames) with blind walling above rising to a plain parapet. On the blind walling is original lettering VITA ET PAX, coloured bright red. At the (liturgical) east end is a slim rectangular tower with a recessed cross, painted red. The flat roof is hidden by a parapet.

Internally, metal-framed doors lead from a lobby into a low vestibule with a baptistery on the south side. The vestibule opens into the main interior which is a broad but low space, with rectangular openings to narrow side passages and a flat ceiling with rectangular lights providing top lighting. The square piers between the openings to the passages are splayed on the nave side, as if to bear the arches of a different roof. The windows in both side passages and the larger metal-framed window in the baptistery have original stained glass, though the windows in the north side passage are no longer external. A wide square opening gives onto the simple shallow sanctuary which is also top-lit. The fittings are simple and modern.

Diocese: Westminster

Architect: Dom Constantine Bosschaerts

Original Date: 1940

Conservation Area: No

Listed Grade: Not listed