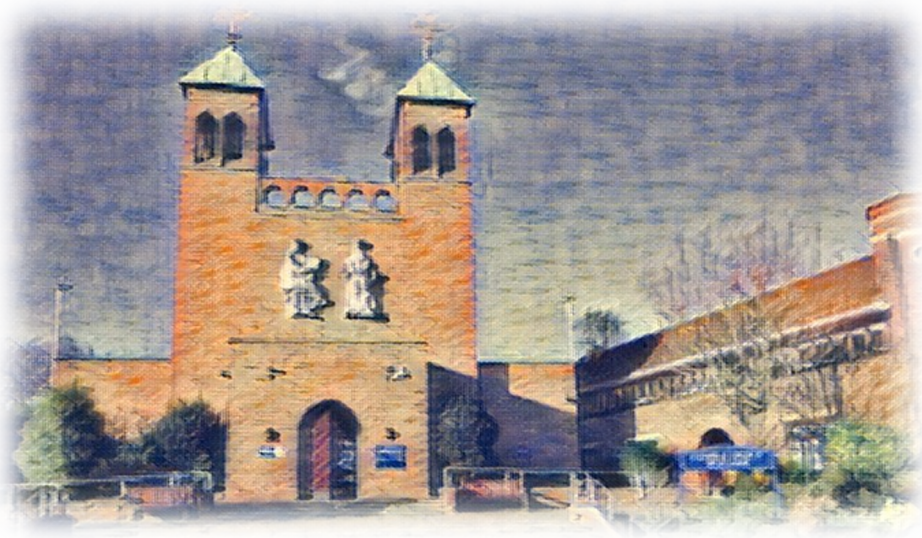


Saint Luke's Catholic Church

Pinner



History of the parish

Following the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 new missions began to be established in this area, with the first local post-reformation church founded by Cardinal Manning in Harrow in 1873. From 1898 a priest from Harrow began to celebrate Masses in a public hall in Wealdstone, and a church was later built, and just over ten years later, in 1914, another new parish was founded, here in Pinner.

Cardinal Bourne appointed Fr Caulfield to establish a parish in Pinner, and he took up residence in Dudley House in Hatch End, celebrating the first Mass in a little chapel he built in the house with a congregation of just twelve new parishioners. Mass continued to be celebrated there until the first St Luke's Church was opened on Love Lane, dedicated on the feast day of St Luke the Evangelist, 18 October 1915.

That church, in the gothic style was designed by Percy Lamb, a former pupil of J F Bentley, who assisted Bentley in the supervision of the building of Westminster Cathedral. The planned nave of the church was never built and by the 1950s there was need for a much larger church, which in 1957 was built alongside the original church. With the former church still standing, being adapted in the 1980s to serve as a parish centre, but still retaining some of the original features.

During the First World War some Belgian refugees sought shelter in Pinner and joined the congregation of St Luke's, after the war those who had sought refuge in Pinner arranged for a bell to be brought from Belgium and installed in the original church, which was moved into the north tower of the new church, and still rings out in Pinner today.

The new church

Francis X Velarde OBE (1897-1960) was widely regarded as the leading architect of Catholic churches of the time, particularly in his native Liverpool, and was brought in by Fr Wilfrid Trotman to build the much-needed new church. Trotman, a liturgist and composer, clearly

had great faith in Velarde's skill, writing: "while I live, and I am here, I'll have no repository art invading this church. Nothing will go in it that has not the approval of the architect".

St Luke's was the earliest of four churches in the Diocese of Westminster built to designs by Velarde, in what is considered a neo-Romanesque version of a continental modern style, using pale brown bricks and with a roof covering of copper. The building costs at the time were in the region of £50,000.



Exterior

On approaching the church there is a striking Portland stone sculpture by David John of the Virgin Mary sitting for St Luke, who is portrayed as an artist to represent the tradition that he painted a portrait of Mary. St Luke has his symbol of the ox sitting below his seat, while Mary depicted knitting is sitting above, rather unusually, a dog for which the model was Fr Trotman's boxer dog, Punch!

The towers, which at 75ft can be visible from Harrow Hill, are rectangular with paired round-headed arches and pyramidal copper roofs, with non-matching crosses for decorative variety.

Interior

As you enter the church it's difficult not to be struck by Velarde's recurring use of gold mosaic arches contrasting with the off-white walls, and the striking geometric panels in the blue ceiling and sanctuary, all well-lit from the considerable sized windows around the church.

On the right, is the former baptistery, now St Luke's chapel, which contains stained glass windows by Frank Humphreys from the original church, and a window created for the centenary by Caroline Benyon depicting St Luke and an ox.

Facing the St Luke's chapel is the Lady chapel, with a statue of a seated Madonna with Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes on her knee. This was carved from Gris Mouchette limestone, by David John, a sculptor and liturgical designer who provided many of the notable elements in the church. This was a gift to the parish by Velarde.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the church is the panelled blue ceiling of the nave and back of the sanctuary. It's divided into three-foot square panels decorated in light and dark blue and continues down the wall behind the altar, forming the background to a gilded cross supporting a life-size sculpture in makore wood of the crucified Christ by David John, flanked by attendant angels, one holding a chalice and the other a cloth, with a regal crown placed above the head of Christ.

The tabernacle behind the altar is in black and gold featuring the ancient Christian symbol of the fish, a wheat sheaf symbolising the Blessed Sacrament, as well as a cross. The interior of the tabernacle is gilded.

To the right of the sanctuary are tall double arches opening to the Holy Family side chapel below and the organ gallery above; facing it on the other side of the sanctuary is a full-height window like those in the aisles.

The baptismal font is a solid oak bowl with a brass cover, which was moved in recent years from the existing Lady chapel to here at the foot of the sanctuary.

Other notable features in the church include the holy water stoups in Italian limestone with plated steel fishes set into the base, and the candlesticks of wrought iron decorated with a chevron pattern in gold.

The interior of the church has remained little altered apart from the reordering of the sanctuary, which involved the removal of the high altar and communion rails following the Second Vatican Council. The tabernacle was subsequently relocated to where it originally stood by the back wall. The rails were retained and are still in the church, now attached to the wall of the church by the entrance, but the new furnishings are all in keeping with the original style of the church. Like many of Velarde's other churches the underground heating system never provided sufficient heat, so heaters were later installed.

The church was finally consecrated on 14 July 1978, by Cardinal Basil Hume.

The church is a Grade II listed building, in recognition of being "a good example of the post-war work of one of the most highly-regarded and original ecclesiastical architects of the C20, F X Velarde, showing his distinctive synthesis of modern and traditional influences, and his compositional use of bold elemental forms to create a church of harmonious form and massing" (Official Listing)

"It is the humble simplicity of the nave wall that accentuates the glory of a suspended flat ceiling panelled off in varying shades of blue. Its regal sumptuousness is continued down the sanctuary wall, where behind the altar a great gold cross, really part of the same panelling device, bears the crucified Christ in waxed mahogany. Velarde has turned his attention, as Pinner shows, more to colour effect, and at Pinner too shows us what can be done with glass."

Catholic Herald, description of St Luke's, 1957

Sources: Harrison, St Luke's Catholic Church, Pinner, The Story of a Parish; F.X. Velarde, Wilkinson and Crompton; Historic England Official Listing; Taking Stock Catholic Churches of England & Wales