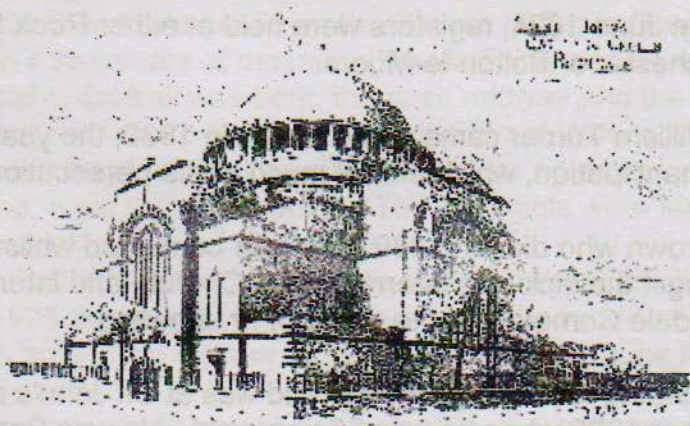


**Welcome**

**To**

**The Church of**



**St. John the Baptist**

**Rochdale**

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PARISH

During the reign of King Henry VIII came the period of history known as "The Reformation" when it became a legal offence to practise the Catholic Faith. Church buildings were confiscated from the control of the Pope and Hierarchy and put under the jurisdiction of the Crown. It was a dark time many Catholics under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were imprisoned or executed because they chose to remain true to the Catholic Faith. The loss of churches and the persecution of the Catholic Faith severely diminished numbers. In 1767 the Return of the Papists listed fourteen in number.

In 1791 the Reverend Roland Broomhead petitioned to have the Roman Catholic Chapel in Rochdale recorded, naming himself as Officiating Priest and Minister.

Before June 1824, registers were held at either Rook Street, Manchester or Bolton-le-Moors.

Fr. William Turner came to the parish in 1830, the year after the Act of Emancipation, which ended much of the persecution.

Fr. Brown who died in 1839 of a fever contracted whilst working amongst the sick was interred in the Church, and later re-interred in Rochdale Cemetery in the grave of Fr. Dowling.

Fr. Dowling was born in Bolton and was at St. John's on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1839 when he was 28 years old. He was Parish Priest at St. John's until his death in 1891. The street outside the church is named after him.

Fr. Moriaty was his curate until Watts St. Chapel (St. Patrick's) was opened on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1861.

In 1851 the only time a religious census was taken in England, the parish of St. John's was very extensive, covering Todmorden, Littleborough, Whitworth, Castleton and Norden.



The map of 1851 shows St. John's Chapel (School and Graveyard); many parishioners will remember this as the old hall on Ann Street.

In 1879 Fr. Edward O'Neill celebrated Mass in Littleborough on Easter Sunday, the first Mass there since the reign of Henry VIII.

The 1922 map shows the R. C. Church, and a separate school, later known as the Displaced Persons Chapel, (many parishioners will remember it as a downstairs classroom, and an upstairs billiard hall) and St. John's convent that later became the old presbytery.

## THE PRESENT CHURCH

The present church was the inspiration of the Reverend Henry Chipp who was Parish Priest from 1897 until 1936. He wanted it designed in Byzantine Style based on the Church of Santa Sophia in Istanbul, with a sanctuary of mosaic. (That building was designed to manipulate light, the hall was dark, the apse midway and the heavens light.) Plans were prepared before the Great War, when the cost of the building including the campanile was an estimated twelve thousand, eight hundred pounds. The architects were Mr. E. Bower Norris, and Mr. Oswald Hill.

Bishop Casartelli laid the foundation stone on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1923. It was completed in 1925 at a cost of twenty one thousand pounds without campanile. It is built in the style of a Greek cross, and with the four transepts forming the arms of the cross. The concrete dome and barrel vaults are one single slab of concrete, only five inches thick at the dome. It is pendentive in style. The outer is faced with brick; local builders R & T Haworth, whose buildings include the Fire Station, the Public Baths, Champness Hall, and most of the Corporation Housing Estates in Rochdale, did this. The dome is 68ft in dia. and 95ft. from the ground. The first dome of St. Sophia's was not in the correct proportions and had to be replaced after it collapsed. There are three five light windows in the transept arms, and thirty-six small windows around the base of the dome. The church had two side chapels, The Sacred Heart and Lady Chapel.



The altar, pulpit, organ and pews were transferred from the old church. There were also two chapels at the rear of the church, one dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and one to St. Anthony of Padua. There are fourteen Stations of the Cross that tell the story of the first Good Friday and are used as a Catholic devotion. The balconies are probably taken from the style of eastern churches, a balcony around the upper storey, a matroneum or gynaeconitis, was an area set-aside for women and children.

Bishop Thomas Henshaw consecrated the church, when it was free from debt, on 24th September 1930. The cost of mosaic for the apse alone was an estimated one thousand pounds.

The mosaic cost four thousand pounds and was designed by Eric Newton, son of Ludwig Oppenheimer and Edith Newton, and was completed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1933. The central figure being that of Christ the King, a relatively new feast day. The Papal Coat of Arms of Pope Pius XI and the Coat of Arms of Bishop Henshaw are on the side walls.

The mosaics in Byzantine times were zoned. The highest, lightest, purest zone of heaven contained the figure of Christ in the cupola, eternal and transcendental scenes from the Ascension and/or Pentecost. The second zone was usually scenes from the life of Christ and the Death of Our Lady, salvation and resurrection, the calendar of the Christian year, Holy Places, Bethlehem or Golgotha. The third zone, the terrestrial zone usually saints, male saints nearer the apse and female saints further away.

The mosaics have recently been repaired and cleaned by Paul Lupton (Alberti Lupton) at a cost of four thousand pounds.

The Parish is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and the statue is a constant reminder of St. John's devotion to Christ.

This is a place where people gather to celebrate the Mass and pray.

We thank God that over the years, Christians are all praying and committed to work for unity. We ask that you join your prayers to ours before you leave.